

**BUS5000W**

**FINAL ARTICLE**

**B2B BRAND ENGAGEMENT IN SOCIAL MEDIA: THE EMPLOYEE'S  
PERSPECTIVE**

Christine Pitt (PTTCHR009)

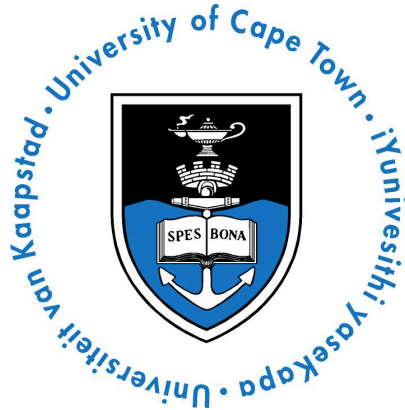
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Supervisor:  
Dr. Elsamari Botha

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**Surname** Pitt  
**Name** Christine Sarah  
**Student Number** PTTCHR009  
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## ABSTRACT

Brand engagement, or the process of how customers and other stakeholders form emotional or rational attachments to brands has garnered considerable attention in the marketing literature in recent years. Brand engagement is important because it is a construct strongly related to brand equity, or in simple terms the “value of the brand”. Recently, the nature of brand engagement has also changed significantly because of the advent of social media. Not only do users of these social media share personal information with each other, they also comment on, contribute to, and share opinions on the brands that engage them.

While the literature is extensive on brand engagement and social media, most of the emphasis is on *customers*, rather than other stakeholders such as employees, suppliers, and investors. Moreover, the research focuses almost entirely on *consumers*, the customers of business-to-consumer firms, rather than on the industrial and organizational customers of business-to-business (B2B) firms or their stakeholders. Only very recently have scholars begun to explore both customer and employee engagement and their effects on firm performance in both the business-to-consumer and business-to-business arenas. The research presented in this dissertation attempts to grow the literature in two ways. First, it focuses on brand engagement in business-to-business firms rather than business-to-consumer; second, it does this by studying a stakeholder group other than customers, namely, employees. Moreover, it does this through the employee lens, rather than the lens of the firm; in other words it explores how employees engage with firms rather than how firms engage with their employees.

The study utilizes an exploratory research design focusing on qualitative data. The data consist of job reviews posted by employees of B2B firms on the social medium Glassdoor.com. Glassdoor.com collects company reviews and real salaries from employees of a range of organizations and displays them anonymously, and users are also able to rate their employees on a five-star scale. The firms chosen were based on a ranking study by the research firm Brandwatch, and were split into two groups, namely the 30 top ranked firms, and the 30 bottom ranked firms. These reviews were then analyzed, using Hart’s theory of word choice and verbal tone, in DICTION, the content analysis software.

The results indicate that there are significant differences between top ranked and bottom ranked firms, and also between top rated and bottom rated firms. Employees of top ranked firms are significantly more optimistic in their reviews,

while employees of bottom ranked firms express significantly more certainty, activity and realism. There are no significant differences with regard to commonality. With regard to firm ratings, the employees of highly rated firms are significantly more optimistic, while employees of low rated firms score significantly more on all the other dimensions of word choice and verbal tone. The employees of top ranked firms are significantly less insistent in their reviews but display significantly more embellishment, variety and complexity. Similarly, in the case of firm ratings, highly rated reviews are significantly less insistent, but exhibit significantly more embellishment, variety and complexity.

The thesis contributes to academic knowledge in four ways. First, it is the first study to consider brand engagement in the business-to-business environment from an employee perspective. Second, the study contributes by providing a perspective on brand engagement from two sides, namely highly ranked B2B companies and low ranked B2B companies, as well as highly rated B2B companies and low rated B2B companies. It highlights the differences between these two groups with regard to brand engagement. Furthermore, it permits a focus on the differences between employees who rate an employer brand high versus those that rate it low, regardless of how the brand is ranked independently. Stated differently, in a brand engagement context, the study identifies specific dimensions or calculated variables that distinguish high and low rankings and ratings. Third, this is the first study that examines employee brand engagement using Hart's theory of word choice and verbal tone. This means that it employs a robust means of comparing pieces of text, or in this particular case, the text resulting from an employee's review and rating of an employer, as a proxy for employee brand engagement. Fourth, this study is the first to use the DICTION content analysis software to examine employee brand engagement in a business-to-business context. It demonstrates DICTION's ability to operationalize Hart's five dimensions of text, and the calculated variables, as well as confirming DICTION's capacity to handle very large text files.

The study also has implications for marketing managers, and for brand executives in the business-to-business arena specifically. First, it enables managers to identify the most important dimensions of brand engagement according to Hart's theory, when employee reviews are posted on social media. When managers are able to discern which dimensions figure prominently in the most highly regarded brands according to employees, they can begin to formulate strategies that might enable them to develop these dimensions in their own environment. Likewise, when they are able to distinguish the dimensions that mark the least highly regarded brands, or the dimensions that occasion

negative reviews, they will be able to develop strategies that enable their firms to overcome these effects. Second, the use of data such as that available on Glassdoor will allow managers to compare the nature of their brand engagement to others, such as competitors or firms they wish to benchmark against, and to develop strategies that will enable them to shift their level of brand engagement over time. Third, the results of the study reinforce the notion that brands and human capital are more important and interlinked than most managers acknowledge. The management of these two assets therefore requires more than occasional attention; rather, they should become part of regular organizational brand strategy.

**Keywords:**

Brand engagement, employees as stakeholders, business-to-business, social media, theory of word choice and verbal tone.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

The notion of brand engagement, or the process of how customers and other stakeholders form emotional or rational attachments to brands has recently garnered considerable attention in the marketing literature (e.g. Baldus, Voorhees, and Calantone, 2015; Brodie, Hollebeek, Juric and Ilic, 2011; Brodie, Ilic, Juric and Hollebeek, 2013; de Villiers, 2015; Graffigna and Gambetti, 2015; Hollebeek, Glynn and Brodie, 2014; Hollebeek, 2011a). Brand engagement is important because it is a construct strongly related to brand equity, or in simple terms the “value of the brand”. As Keller (2012) sees it, from a consumer perspective, brand equity has to do with the consumer’s awareness and articulation of a brand’s features and associations (that is, the extent to which they engage with the brand), which in turn drive attribute perceptions.

The nature of brand engagement has also changed significantly in the recent past. This has been occasioned by the advent of social media. Social media have been defined as follows: “Social media employ mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms via which individuals and communities share, cocreate, discuss, and modify user-generated content (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy and Silvestre, 2011, p.241). The best known social media include the social networking platform Facebook, the micro-blogging website Twitter, and the video sharing website YouTube. However, there are also more specialized social media platforms such as the travel and hospitality platform TripAdvisor, the picture-sharing platform Instagram, and the ephemeral content sharing platform, Snapchat. There are also social media platforms with more of a business-to-business slant, including the peer-to-peer platform LinkedIn, and the job description and evaluation site Glassdoor.com. Not only do users of these social media share personal information with each other, they also comment on, contribute to, and share opinions on the brands that engage them (Berthon, Pitt, Plangger and Shapiro, 2012; Kietzmann et al., 2011).

The literature is extensive on brand engagement and social media. However, while brand engagement is about a brand’s interaction with all stakeholders, two observations are clear on the extant research in this regard: first, almost all the emphasis is on *customers*, rather than other stakeholders such as employees, suppliers, and investors; second, the research focuses almost entirely on *consumers*, the customers of business-to-consumer (B2C) firms, rather than on

the industrial and organizational customers of business-to-business (B2B) firms or their stakeholders. Only very recently have scholars begun to explore both customer (CE) and employee engagement (EE) and their effects on firm performance (Kumar and Pansari, 2016) in both the B2C and B2B arenas. The research presented in this dissertation attempts to grow the literature in two ways. First by focusing on brand engagement in B2B firms rather than B2C, and second, by studying a stakeholder group other than customers, namely, employees. Moreover, it does this through the employee lens, rather than the lens of the firm; in other words it explores how employees engage with firms rather than how firms engage with their employees.

The following section provides a summary of the literature reviewed in support of the current research, followed by a summary of the research question and objectives.

## **1.2. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

This section outlines the existing literature that has provided the theoretical foundations upon which the need for the current research was identified and developed. This section is introduced with a brief operationalization of brand engagement in the context of the current research, as well as a short overview of social media. Hart's theory (1984a; 1984b; 2000; 2001) of word choice and verbal tone is then explained and its relevance to the current research justified.

### **1.2.1. Brand Engagement**

Customers purchase branded offerings for a number of reasons. Berthon, Hulbert and Pitt (1999) distill all of these by contending that brands fulfill the basic function of reduction for customers. Three kinds of cost and risks are reduced by brands. Brands reduce *search costs*: by purchasing brands with which they are familiar and that they trust, customers save themselves the effort, the time, and sometimes the financial resources that they would have to expend in searching for alternative offerings. For example, consumers repurchase the same brand of toothpaste because it reduces the time and effort it would take to search for an alternative; industrial buyers repurchase the same brand of stationary from the same supplier because it saves the time and effort, as well as the monetary costs it would take to search for an alternative. Brands reduce *perceived risk* for customers: By purchasing brands that they know and trust, customers reduce for themselves the consequences they might incur if they had

purchased another wrong brand. Sometimes the consequences of this might be trivial (such as purchasing a novel that isn't an enjoyable read, and suffering the consequences of boredom). At other times the consequences can be serious, for example, purchasing vehicle parts that are defective can lead to accidents. Brands reduce *psychological risk*: Brands allow customers to "say something" about themselves, and to "fit in". Using or wearing a particular brand might permit a customer to imply that they are stylish, or smart, or wise. Conversely, using or wearing the wrong brand could communicate to others, such as friends or peers, that the individual does not fit in, or isn't "cool." In simple terms, there is a risk of making a fool of oneself.

Firms have therefore sought to engage their target customers with their brands, and these efforts have ranged from simple promotions, to more complex strategies such as the exploitation of brand communities (McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig, 2002; Schau, Muñiz and Arnould, 2009). The advent of social media has furthered customer engagement with brands in many ways. Some of this has been intentional, and driven by the strategies of organizations, in the form of online communities on social media platforms such as fan pages on Facebook. Customers rather than firms however, have driven much of the customer engagement with brands. Customers generate content (Berthon, Pitt and Campbell, 2008). They upload videos to YouTube, and post both favorable and unfavorable comments and content on a range of social media, including platforms such as Facebook, micro-blogging sites such as Twitter, and specialist travel websites such as TripAdvisor.

Passikoff (2013) adequately expresses the problems of defining brand engagement. He argues that merely getting attention to, and even awareness of a brand do not mean engagement with that brand. Engagement with a brand, he contends, is emotional, and should be the brand manager's ultimate objective. Consumers who are truly engaged with a brand will see it as better meeting the expectations they hold for the ideal offering in a particular offering category. This is important because real brand engagement will not only impact the consumer's behavior, but ultimately, for the firm, the brand's sales and profitability.

Kumar and Pansari (2016) define engagement as the "attitude, behavior, the level of connectedness among customers, between customers and employees, and of customers and employees within a firm" (p.498). They go on to argue that the more positive the attitude and behavior and the higher the level of

connectedness, the higher the level of stakeholder engagement will be. Stakeholder engagement is important because there is evidence that suggests that successful engagement strategies result in improved firm performance. As alluded to in the introductory paragraphs, most of the extant literature on brand engagement has focused on the engagement of consumers with the brands of B2C firms.

Less attention has been given, first, to the engagement of customers of B2B firms with their brands. While there has been work on the implementation of social media strategies in B2B environments (e.g. Bernard and Bernard, 2016; Wang, Pauleen and Zhang, 2016; Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2011), there is scant literature on brand engagement in B2B marketing. Second, almost all of the focus of the research on brand engagement has been on consumers as customers, whereas Kumar and Pansari (2016) point out that other stakeholders such as employees, are critical to understand as well. There is little or no literature on the nature of employee brand engagement in B2B firms.

### **1.2.2. Social Media**

Social media are human engagement mechanisms that use mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms on which individuals and communities can share, co-create, discuss and modify user-generated content (Kietzmann et al, 2011). One of the major effects of social media has been the shifting of power from corporations and large organizations to the masses, as speculated on by Pitt, Berthon, Watson and Zinkhan (2002). The latter authors argued that power shifts to individuals when organizations can no longer “shout louder” in mass media, when most of the communication that occurs is not only two-way, but also occurs in a technological environment where no one has “better” access to the medium than anyone else. Communication about brands and products happens, with or without permission of the organizations in question.

Marketing scholars have already begun to give considerable attention to social media and its impact on brands, marketing communication and customer engagement (e.g., Felix, Rauschnabel and Hinsch, 2017; Kumar, et al., 2016; Lamberton and Stephen, 2016). More specifically, some of this research has explored the impact of virtual presence on brand valuation and purchase intentions (Naylor, Lamberton and West, 2012); how firms can track social media



to gauge brand sentiment (Schweidel and Moe, 2014); why consumers contribute to social media such as Twitter (Toubia and Stephen, 2013); understanding who the influential contributors to social networks are (Trusov, Bodapati and Bucklin, 2010); and, how consumers use social media not only to advertise themselves but also to protect their privacy (Tucker, 2014).

Berthon et al. (2012) note how critical it is for marketers to understand the customer in the age of social media. The traditionally submissive customer, in both B2C and B2B environments, has been transformed from a passive purchaser and user into a critical source of creative talent by social media technologies. This turns the tables on marketers, with the resultant shift in power referred to above. Firms become vulnerable to active customers and employees, who formerly possessed little in the way of traditional power, but can now exploit the networks and influence afforded by social media. For many firms, including those in B2B markets, the emphasis has shifted from simply ‘telling’ customers and employees, to inducing them to engage with offerings and institutional brands.

### **1.2.3. Brand Engagement through Social Media**

What is the best way to study brand engagement, whether by customers, employees, or any other stakeholders on social media? Many options present themselves. For example, it might be possible to conduct focus groups or depth interviews with particular stakeholders in order to interrogate them concerning the nature of their engagement. This would contribute context and richness to the research. It might also be possible to conduct a survey of a large group of stakeholders who engage with brands on social media. This would enable the researcher to generalize. However, the nature of social media presents a unique research opportunity to scholars in the sense that it automatically becomes a readily available repository of data. This data can be aggregated across different kinds of social media (e.g. Reynecke, Pitt and Berthon, 2011; Botha, Farshid and Pitt, 2010), or studied in the context of a particular social medium, such as comments on the video sharing site YouTube (Berthon et al., 2008; Campbell, Pitt, Parent and Berthon, 2011a; Campbell, Pitt, Parent and Berthon, 2011b).

A challenge facing researchers in this regard however, is to find a strong theoretical framework that enables the classification of this content, or quantifies it for further analysis. Hart’s theory of word choice and verbal tone provides such a framework. It offers researchers a robust way of studying the text in a document. Text generated by stakeholders while engaging with a brand in social

media can be gathered, and then classified and analyzed according to Hart's framework.

#### **1.2.4. Hart's Theory of Word Choice and Verbal Tone**

The political scientist and communications scholar Roderick Hart (1984a; 1984b; 2000; 2001; see also Short and Palmer, 2008) developed his theory of document content by asking a fundamental question: If only five questions could be asked of a given passage, which five questions would provide the most robust understanding? Hart was trying to make sense of the speeches of presidents and presidential candidates, and needed a common base from which to analyze and explain the words and documents of various politicians. His theory focuses on the subtle power of word choice and verbal tone. His theory is in fact culled from other work in linguistic theory conducted by a number of social thinkers, and so in that sense Hart's work integrates these into a comprehensive theory. Hart posits that the five most important themes in a piece of text or document can, if analyzed, provide significant insight into the nature of that piece of text or document. Furthermore, Hart's theory argues that a further four fundamental variables can be calculated from any piece of text, namely, how insistent it is, how much variety it exhibits, to what extent the text embellishes, and how simple or complex the text is. These are described and briefly discussed below.

##### **1.2.4.1 Fundamental Variables**

To address Hart's fundamental inquiry, "If only five questions could be asked of a given passage, which five questions would provide the most robust understanding?" he suggests that these queries should be posed (1984a; 1984b; 2000; 2001; Short and Palmer, 2008):

1. To what extent is the text *certain*?
2. How *optimistic* (or pessimistic) is the piece of text?
3. To what extent does the piece of text exhibit *activity*?
4. How *realistic* is the piece of text?
5. To what extent does the text communicate communitarian concepts (in other words to what extent is there *commonality*?)

By calculating these dimensions for any piece of text, a researcher can gain insight into the nature of not only the text, but also the thinking behind the composer of that text. In this way comparisons between different texts or scripts,

and perhaps more importantly, their creators, can be made. The dimensions can also be used as predictor variables where researchers are interested in associating them with other constructs of interest.

#### 1.2.4.2. Calculated Variables

Hart also incorporates variables that he calls “calculated variables” (Short and Palmer, 2008), that can be mathematically computed from a piece of text, into his theory. These are all centered on unique theoretical underpinnings and can be assigned scores based on any specific patterns in a piece of text. The first calculated variable is *insistence*, which has to do with the use of repeated words, and is a measure of the extent to which codes are restricted and semantic “contentedness” is achieved. The assumption here is that where key terms are repeated, a preference for a limited, ordered word is indicated.

The second calculated variable is called *variety*, which divides the number of different words in a passage by the total number of words. Thus, a high score on variety would indicate that the speaker or a writer is avoiding overstatement and has a preference for precision.

The third calculated variable is that of *embellishment*, which is computed by dividing the number of adjectives by the number of verbs. Excessive embellishment slows down the reader’s ability to interpret the text.

The fourth calculated variable is that of *complexity*, which is measured by dividing the average number of characters per word in a given input file by the total number of words. Convolved phrasings make a text’s ideas abstract and its implications unclear for the reader or for the audience.

Again, by computing these variables for a corpus of text, a researcher can gain a quantitative assessment of the text, as well as insights into the thinking of the creator of that text. Comparisons between different bodies of text can be made, and the variables can also be dependent on other criteria, or tested as predictors of other constructs of interest.

Hart (1984a; 1984b; 2000; 2001) constructed software to that enables the dimensions and variables discussed above to be calculated. This software, called DICTION, has been used as a research tool in a wide range of disciplines within the social sciences. In business and management research it has for example been used in accounting (e.g. Barkemeyer, Comyns, Figge, and Napolitano,

2014; Brennan and Kirwan, 2015); finance (e.g. Ferris, Hao and Liao, 2013; Kearney and Liu, 2014); entrepreneurship (e.g. Parhanhangas and Ehrlich, 2014; Williams, Novicevic and Ammeter, 2015); business ethics (e.g. Yuthas, Rogers and Dillard, 2002); and, strategic management (e.g. Finkelstein, 1997; Short and Palmer, 2008). In marketing specifically, it has, amongst others, been used by Aaker (1997) in her work on brand personality; Yadav, Prabhu and Chandy (2007) to study the contents of CEO letters to shareholders; and Zachary, McKenny, Short, Davis and Wu (2011) to explore the nature of franchise branding from an organizational identity perspective.

### **1.3. RESEARCH QUESTION AND OBJECTIVES**

Based on the discussion of brand engagement, social media and Hart's theory of word choice and verbal tone discussed above, the research question that guided the focus of this study can be stated as follows:

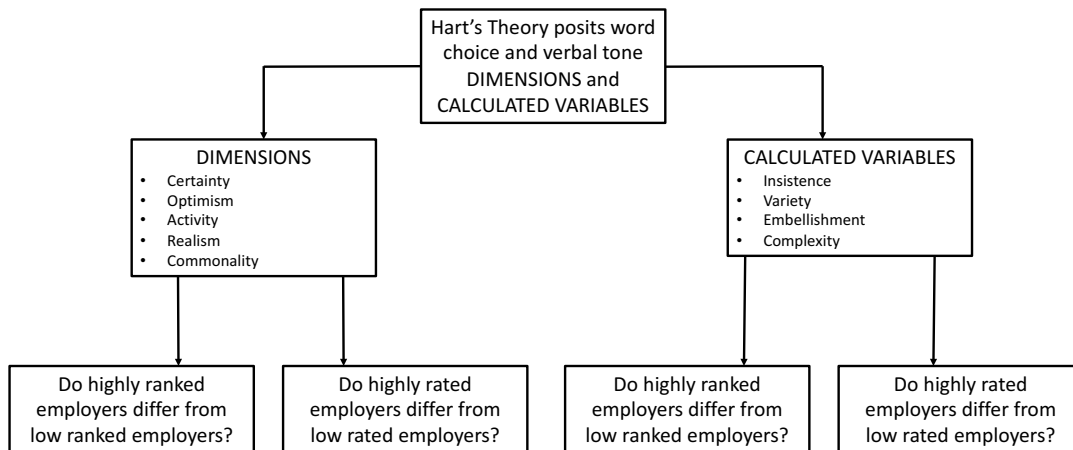
*How does the brand engagement (via social media) of employees of highly ranked B2B employers differ from employees' social media brand engagement with low ranked B2B employers, and does this engagement vary by employee review rating?*

In order to answer this research question, the following objectives were formulated:

- To determine whether there is a difference between employee brand engagement in highly ranked B2B firms and employee brand engagement in low ranked B2B firms, with regard to the dimensions of word choice and verbal tone.
- To determine whether there is a difference between employee brand engagement in highly rated B2B firms and employee brand engagement in low rated B2B firms, with regard to the dimensions of word choice and verbal tone.
- To determine whether there is a difference between employee brand engagement in highly ranked B2B firms and employee brand engagement in low ranked B2B firms, with regard to the calculated variables of word choice and verbal tone.
- To determine whether there is a difference between employee brand engagement in highly rated B2B firms and employee brand engagement in low rated B2B firms, with regard to the calculated variables of word choice and verbal tone.

The research question and associated objectives is best illustrated in the conceptual model below. Figure 1 illustrates the main research question that the study described here seeks to answer, as well as raising additional questions of academic interest. Hart's theory of word choice and verbal tone posits that for any piece of text, such as a job review in social media, there are five dimensions (realism, optimism, certainty, activity and commonality), as well as four variables that can be calculated for it (insistence, embellishment, variety and complexity). Thus, it would be important to know whether brand engagement with regard to the dimensions differed between highly ranked firms and low ranked firms, and whether this differed between highly rated and low rated firms. Similarly, it would be important to know whether brand engagement with regard to the calculated variables differed between highly ranked firms and low ranked firms, and whether this differed between highly rated and low rated firms.

FIGURE 1.1: CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF THIS STUDY



The methodology outlines the research design and method used to investigate the research question and objectives follow in section 1.4, including an examination of the target population and sample design. The contribution of the study follows, in which the significance of the current research is outlined. Thereafter the demarcation of the study is postulated, followed by concluding remarks.

## **1.4. METHODOLOGY**

The following section outlines the research design and method used in order to examine the differences between employee brand engagement in highly ranked and rated B2B firms versus low ranked and rated B2B firms. The target population and sample design for the current research are then outlined.

### **1.4.1. Research Design and Method**

The proposed study will utilize an exploratory research design focusing on qualitative data. An exploratory research design is research conducted for a problem that has not been studied more clearly, established priorities, develops operational definitions and improve the final research design (Shields and Rangarjan, 2013). This is most appropriate for this study because hitherto data from specialist social media has not been used to study employee brand engagement, nor has content analysis software been used in this regard.

In particular, an analysis of existing data was performed. This has the advantage of making data readily and easily available, and the content is in the individuals own words. Furthermore the method is unobtrusive and has the benefit of being unobtrusive. To some extent the researcher foregoes the ability to generalize, as the comments come from a specific social media website, but given the ability to gather large amounts of data, this disadvantage is overcome to a large extent.

### **1.4.2 The Data Source**

The data source chosen for this study is the website Glassdoor.com. Glassdoor is essentially a social medium in that it is open to all – employers and employees, and indeed anyone who is interested in posting about, or learning about jobs, and recruiting employees. According to its website, Glassdoor....“collects company reviews and real salaries from employees of large companies and displays them anonymously for all members to see” (White, 2015). The website averages the reported salaries as well as the average reviews of companies as employers, as well as posting the individual reviews employees make of the management and culture of the companies they work for.

Like travel rating social media such as TripAdvisor, and restaurant raters such as OpenTable and Yelp, Glassdoor ratings are based on user-generated reviews. Employees of an organization can review or comment on the organization in general, and the pros and cons of working there, and then also award the employer a star rating that ranges from 1 = Very bad to 5 = Very good. Glassdoor verifies that each review of a company comes from real employees by means of technological checks of e-mail addresses and through screenings by a content management team (Wong, 2013). Another feature of Glassdoor is the interviews section, in which individuals who have interviewed for a position at a company are able to describe in detail what the interview process was like and what kinds of questions they were asked. These interviews can be accessed by individuals interested in working for those companies, and who might want to prepare for an interview (e.g., Balise, 2015).

#### **1.4.3. Data Collection and Analysis**

Glassdoor.com uses the number of five-star ratings an employer receives to rank the “best” and “worst” employers to work for. This study considers two notions of “best” and “worst”: the first is in terms of star ratings awarded on Glassdoor; the second is an independent ranking of the best and worst B2B brands. This was done in order to overcome the possibility of common methods bias –a bias where the measured difference is due to the study itself (or something else), rather than the actuality of the situation (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee and Podsakoff, 2003). Therefore, a search was made to ascertain the 30 best and the 30 worst B2B companies to work for, and the study by Brandwatch (2015) was identified as the source of this ranking.

“Brandwatch is one of the world’s leading social intelligence companies. Its social media listening and analytics technology platform gathers millions of online conversations every day and provides users with the tools to analyze them, empowering brands and agencies to make smarter, data-driven business decisions”, (Brandwatch, 2015, p.52). Data for the Brandwatch report was gathered by the firm using its social media monitoring platform, Brandwatch Analytics. The report uses this platform to search for mentions of a B2B brand from over 90 million web sources such as news portals, social networks, blogs, and forums. Brandwatch then ranks the top 200 B2B brands according to their social media presence.

The top 30 of the 200 B2B brands were chosen to represent the “best” or highest ranked B2B brands on social media, and the bottom 30 of the 200 brands were

chosen to represent the “worst” or “lowest ranked” B2B brands. In a sense it is not strictly accurate to refer to “best” and “worst” B2B brands in this context, rather it would be more correct to refer to the top 30- and the bottom 171-200 ranked B2B brands. Brands 171-200 are not necessarily “bad” or low performing brands, they simply do not score well on social media presence. However, for the sake of simplicity this study refers to the “highly ranked” and “low ranked” B2B brands

Then, the text was content analyzed using the content analysis software DICTION (<http://www.dictionsoftware.com>). DICTION enables the researcher to compute each of Hart’s fundamental variables, as well as the calculated variables for any piece of written text. Thus, each of the individual reviews from the Glassdoor website can be analyzed by DICTION and scores obtained for each reviewer (employee) on each of Hart’s nine variables. In total the reviews of 6 336 employees were gathered. This formed the data to be analyzed.

Finally, when the data was gathered the highest and lowest ranked, and the highest and lowest rated B2B companies were compared statistically. In this way it was possible to determine whether and how these B2B companies differ significantly in terms of employee engagement with regard to the DICTION fundamental dimensions and calculated variables, and on which specific variables they differ. It is also therefore possible to identify for B2B firms the variables that employees value most (and least) in engaging with them. These issues are summarized in table 1.1 below, which also describes what the basic components of the data set look like.

In summary, the five dimensions of Hart’s theory (date) were measured for the *highest* (and *lowest*) *ranked* and *rated* companies. In addition, the DICTION calculated variables were measured for the top (and lowest) *ranked* and *rated* companies.

#### **1.4.4 Ethical Considerations**

The data will consist of reviews posted by employees of B2B firms on the website Glassdoor.com. This is publically available data, and as such there are no ethical concerns with regard to research design as the data is already available in a public space, and no human subjects will be interviewed or interacted with in any way.



Table 1.1: What the basic components of the data set will look like

<b>"Highest ranked 30 B2B Companies to work for" Job Reviews</b>	<b>"Lowest ranked 30 B2B Companies to work for" Job Reviews</b>
DICTION FUNDAMENTAL VARIABLES: <i>Certainty</i> <i>Optimism</i> <i>Activity</i> <i>Realism</i> <i>Commonality</i>	DICTION FUNDAMENTAL VARIABLES: <i>Certainty</i> <i>Optimism</i> <i>Activity</i> <i>Realism</i> <i>Commonality</i>
DICTION CALCULATED VARIABLES: <i>Insistence</i> <i>Variety</i> <i>Embellishment</i> <i>Complexity</i>	DICTION CALCULATED VARIABLES: <i>Insistence</i> <i>Variety</i> <i>Embellishment</i> <i>Complexity</i>
<b>"Highest rated (5 star) B2B Companies" Job Reviews</b>	<b>"Lowest rated (1 star) B2B Companies" Job Reviews</b>
DICTION FUNDAMENTAL VARIABLES: <i>Certainty</i> <i>Optimism</i> <i>Activity</i> <i>Realism</i> <i>Commonality</i>	DICTION FUNDAMENTAL VARIABLES: <i>Certainty</i> <i>Optimism</i> <i>Activity</i> <i>Realism</i> <i>Commonality</i>

## 1.5. CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

The academic contribution of this thesis is four-fold. First, this research contributes to the marketing literature by being the first study to look at brand engagement in B2B markets from an employee perspective. Most of the marketing literature has considered brand engagement in consumer markets. Furthermore, almost all of the research on brand engagement has considered it from the perspective of customers. The current works view brand engagement from another stakeholder standpoint, namely that of employees.

Second, the study contributes by providing a perspective on brand engagement from two sides, namely highly ranked B2B companies and low ranked B2B companies, as well as highly rated B2B companies and low rated B2B companies. It highlights the differences between these two groups with regard to brand engagement. Furthermore, it permits a focus on the differences between employees who rate an employer brand high versus those that rate it low, regardless of how the brand is ranked independently. Stated differently, in a brand engagement context, it is possible to identify specific dimensions or calculated variables that distinguish high and low rankings and ratings.

Third, this is the first study to examine employee brand engagement using Hart's theory of word choice and verbal tone. Hart's framework provides a robust means of comparing pieces of text, or in this particular case, the text resulting from an employee's review and rating of an employer, as a proxy for employee brand engagement.

Fourth, this study is the first to use the DICTION content analysis software to examine employee brand engagement in a B2B context. It provides evidence of DICTION's ability to operationalize Hart's five dimensions of text, and the calculated variables, as well as confirming DICTION's capacity to handle very large text files.

The study also has implications for marketing managers, and for brand executives in the B2B field specifically. First, it enables managers to identify the most important dimensions of brand engagement according to Hart's theory, when employee reviews are posted on social media. When managers are able to discern which dimensions figure prominently in the most highly regarded brands according to employees, they can begin to formulate strategies that might enable them to develop these dimensions in their own environment. Likewise, when they are able to distinguish the dimensions that mark the least highly regarded brands, or the dimensions that occasion negative reviews, they will be able to develop strategies that enable their firms to overcome these effects.

## **1.6. DEMARCATION OF THE STUDY**

The chapters to follow outline the theoretical foundations of the research, the methodology employed, the results obtained and concluding with a discussion of the results as well as recommendations for future research in this particular field of research. Table 1.2 below outlines the layout of each chapter.

The content of the chapters can be briefly described as follows: Chapter 1 has introduced the problem and its significance, outlined the research question to be answered, and provided a roadmap to the rest of the thesis. Chapters 2 and 3 consist of a literature review of the extant work on social media, brand engagement, content analysis, and the hypotheses to be tested in the research. In Chapter 4 the methodology of the study will be outlined, the data source described and the tools to be used in the analysis introduced. Chapter 5 describes the data analysis. Chapter 6 presents the results of the study and discusses the findings, and also acknowledges the limitations of the research,

discusses the managerial implications of the findings, and identifies avenues for future research.

Table 1.2: Demarcation of the Current Research

<b>Chapter</b>	<b>Description</b>
1	<b>Introduction</b> Background to the study and description of the research problem and its significance.
2	Literature review part 1: <b>Brand Engagement, Social Media and Employee Brand Relationships</b> Theoretical foundation of the study including a discussion of brand engagement and social media
3	Literature review part 2: <b>Understanding Brand Engagement on Social Media through Content Analysis</b> Introduction of different content analysis approaches, Hart's Theory and the study's hypotheses
4	<b>Methodology</b> of study
5	<b>Data analysis</b>
6	<b>Conclusions and Recommendations</b> Results and discussion; Limitations; Managerial implications; Identification of avenues for future research; Conclusion

## 1.7. CONCLUSION

This chapter argued the importance of understanding brand engagement, not only from a consumer perspective, but also from an employee perspective. It also argues the paucity of research on brand engagement in the B2B market, and presents the research question and objectives investigated in this study. The framework with which brand engagement was investigated is Hart's theory (year) of word choice and verbal tone, and is briefly explained in this chapter before the methodology, contribution and demarcation of the study are discussed.

The following chapter provides an in-depth examination of the extant literature in three domains, namely brand engagement, social media, and Hart's theory of word choice and verbal tone. This highlights the main relationship in the current research, specifically the nature of employee brand engagement in the top versus the bottom ranked and rated B2B firms in social media (see Figure 1.1).

## CHAPTER II: BRAND ENGAGEMENT, SOCIAL MEDIA AND EMPLOYEE-BRAND RELATIONSHIPS

### 2.1. INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter provided a brief overview of the current research, as well as a concise summary of the main literature relevant to the research. This chapter provides a more detailed review of the literature on brand engagement, social media, employee brand relationships, and a theory of word choice and verbal tone. In doing so, it sets the scene for examining the overall research question to be addressed, namely: How does the brand engagement (via social media) of employees of highly ranked and rated B2B employers differ from employees' social media brand engagement with low ranked and poorly rated B2B employers?

The literature review begins with a theoretical overview of brand engagement, with special attention to how it has been conceptualized and defined, how it has been operationalized and measured, what the outcomes of brand engagement are, and how brand engagement works in brand communities. Following this, social media is then introduced and its relevance to marketing in general, and this research in particular, is examined. This section also examines the role of brands on social media. Then the broader literature on employee brand relationships is considered, with specific attention given to how employees as stakeholders engage with brands by means of different social media. Finally, a theory of word choice and verbal tone is presented and discussed in detail. The literature review enables a number of hypotheses to be formulated that can then be tested in the research to be conducted in the thesis.

### 2.2. BRAND ENGAGEMENT

In the simplest terms, brand engagement has to do with how individuals as stakeholders (be they customers, employees, suppliers and so forth) engage or involve themselves with a brand. A simple definition of a brand is that it is “a known identity of an *organization* in terms of what products and services they offer but also the essence of what the *organization* stands for in terms of service and other emotional, non-tangible customer or stakeholder concerns” (Antonucci, 2011; italics my own). Merriam-Webster dictionary defines engagement as “emotional involvement or commitment” (with another person or persons, an object, or an idea) (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/engagement>). Thus, more formally, brand engagement might be defined as how stakeholders

involve or commit themselves emotionally to or with the known identity of an organization in terms of what products and services it offers as well as the essence of what the *organization* stands for in terms of service and other emotional, non-tangible stakeholder concerns.

Kumar and Pansari (2016) argue that engagement is critical in today's competitive business environment because of developments in technology, and especially due to the advent of social media. One example of this is Gallup research (cited in Kumar and Pansari, 2016) found that "fully engaged" and "engaged" customers accounted for 23% and 7% increases in revenue. On the other hand, "not engaged" and "actively disengaged" customers caused firms to experience revenue declines of 1% and 13% in each case. However as these authors point out, it is not merely customers that need to be engaged with brands as stakeholders: other organizational participants need to be engaged as well. Chief among these groups are employees. Research by Crim and Sejits (2006), for example, has shown that 84% of highly engaged employees believe they can positively affect the quality of their organization's offerings, as opposed to only 31% of the disengaged employees who believe this. Furthermore, 72% of highly engaged employees believe they can positively affect customer service, versus 27% of the disengaged employees, and 68% of highly engaged employees believe they can positively influence costs in their job or unit, versus just 19% of the disengaged employees. It therefore seems imperative that for organizations to compete successfully, not only do customers need to be engaged, but other stakeholders, and employees in particular, need to be so as well.

### **2.2.1. Conceptualizing Brand Engagement**

Passikoff (2013), writing in the popular business press, adequately expresses the problems of defining brand engagement. He argues that merely getting attention to, and even awareness of a brand do not mean engagement with that brand. Engagement with a brand, he contends, is emotional, and should be the brand manager's ultimate objective. Consumers who are truly engaged with a brand will see it as better meeting the expectations they hold for the ideal offering in a particular offering category. This is important because real brand engagement will not only impact the consumer's behavior, but ultimately, for the firm, the brand's sales and profitability.

Adopting the perspective that brand engagement pertains to involvement and commitment, Graffigna and Gambetti (2015) state that a consumer perceives a brand as engaging when it is emotionally lived as a 'life mate'. Their

conceptualization of brand engagement is that it results from a dynamic process that moves through three phases: friendship, intimacy and symbiosis. Marketers should therefore implement brand strategies based on brand personification, value-based affinity and affective bonding with consumers.

Hollebeek (2011a) goes further, by defining brand engagement as ‘the level of a customer's cognitive, emotional and behavioral investment in specific brand interactions’ (p. 555) and refers to what she calls “themes”, rather than phases of brand engagement, namely immersion, passion and activation. In other work, Hollebeek (2011b) conceptualizes brand engagement as consisting of the dimensions of activation, identification, and absorption, and posits relationships between brand engagement and other marketing constructs, especially customer relationships, retention, and loyalty. Hoeffler and Keller (2002) see brand engagement as the strongest indication of brand loyalty, and a state in which customers go beyond mere purchase and consumption, to one in which they are willing to invest time, money and effort into involving themselves with the brand.

Kumar and Pansari (2016) define engagement as the “attitude, behavior, the level of connectedness among customers, between customers and employees, and of customers and employees within a firm” (p. 498). They go on to argue that the more positive the attitude and behavior and the higher the level of connectedness, the higher the level of stakeholder engagement will be. Stakeholder engagement is important because there is evidence that successful engagement strategies result in improved firm performance. As alluded to in the introduction, most of the extant literature on brand engagement has focused on the engagement of *consumers* with the brands of *B2C firms*. Less attention has been given, first, to the engagement of customers of B2B firms with their brands.

While there has been work on the implementation of social media strategies in B2B environments (e.g. Bernard and Bernard, 2016; Wang, Pauleen and Zhang, 2016; Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2011), there is scant literature on brand engagement in B2B marketing. Second, almost all of the focus of the research on brand engagement has been on consumers as customers, whereas Kumar and Pansari (2016) point out that other stakeholders such as employees, are critical to understand as well. There is little or no literature on the nature of employee brand engagement in B2B firms.

### **2.2.2. Brand Engagement and its Measurement**

A number of marketing scholars have given attention to the measurement of brand engagement and its associated constructs. At a very general level, Kumar and Pansari (2016) consider the engagement (in a broader sense than brand engagement) of an organization's two main groups of stakeholders, namely its employees as its internal-, and its customers as its external stakeholders. They view engagement as mainly having to do with co-creation, interaction, and solution development, and that these activities will be driven by the attitudes of both employees and customers toward the organization. In their work, they developed scales to measure both customer engagement and employee engagement. The former was developed from scratch, and the latter represents a refinement of their earlier work (Kumar and Pansari, 2014).

Employee engagement was defined by Kumar and Pansari (2014) as “a multidimensional construct which comprises of all the different facets of the attitudes and behaviors of employees towards the organization” (p.55). They also proposed that employee engagement consisted of the dimensions of employee satisfaction, employee identification, employee commitment, employee loyalty and employee performance.

While the work of Kumar and Pansari (2014; 2016) focuses on customer and employee engagement in organizations at a more general level, a number of researchers have explored the measurement of brand engagement more specifically. Sprott, Czellar and Spangenberg (2009) consider the notion of brand engagement in self-concept, or a generalized view of brands in relation to the self. They view customers as varying in their propensity to see brands as part of their self-concepts. Their 8-item scale to measure brand engagement in self-concept predicts consumers' differential attention to, memory of, and preference for those brands that they favor. These authors demonstrate statistically that their scale provides an effective general measure of customer brand engagement. Their research also shows that highly engaged consumers are likely to be more brand loyal, and less price sensitive.

Dwivedi, Wilkie, Johnson and Weerawardena (2016) focus more on the measurement of the behaviors that brand engagement occasions, arguing that this is of greater relevance to practitioners than mere psychological measures of the construct. Their work provides a measure of consumer engagement behaviors based on what they call the “Actual Brand Engagement” framework

proposed by brand experts, rather than on more traditional theory-based scale-development methods.

Other researchers have developed measures more specifically targeted at the issues related to brand engagement, rather than brand engagement itself. For example, Calder, Isaac and Malthouse (2016) criticize the development of what they term “conventional, one-size-fits-all” measures using scales with a fixed set of items. They propose more flexible measurement approaches that are context-specific, because they argue that customer experiences will vary depending on the offerings they are engaging with. They demonstrate this approach in three specific contexts; namely, live jazz music, newspapers, and television programs. Another example of more issue-specific attempts to measure brand engagement lies in the work of Cian, Krishna and Elder (2014), who focused on how brand logos and imagery affect the level of consumer engagement with the brand logo. Consumer engagement with the logo was gauged using both self-report measures and as well as eye-tracking technology.

### **2.2.3. The Outcomes of Brand Engagement**

A number of the academic articles already referred to address the outcomes of brand engagement, or stated differently, what happens when stakeholders' engagement with brands varies. For example, Kumar and Pansari (2016) noted that more engaged customers accounted for greater increases in revenue, and Crim and Sejits (2006) showed that engaged employees believed that they could positively affect offering quality, positively affect customer service, and positively influence costs in their job or unit. Hollebeek (2011b) argues that brand engagement can impact customer relationships, retention, and loyalty, while the research of Sprott et al. (2009) demonstrated statistically that highly engaged consumers are more prone to be brand loyal, and less price sensitive. Nevertheless, there have been a few more studies that have concerned themselves chiefly with the outcomes of brand engagement, rather than merely as an additional facet of the research.

In a study of the possible short-term effects of customer participation and customer brand engagement, Apenes and Andrine (2016) demonstrated the positive short-term effects of brand engagement on brand loyalty, and this was mediated by customer satisfaction. Where customers were using social media, brand engagement had a significant positive effect on brand satisfaction. Brand engagement platforms that encompassed relational activities and offerings by stakeholders were the focus of work by Ramaswamy and Ozcan (2016). Using



famous brands like Apple and Starbucks as examples, these authors assert that brand value co-creation is enacted through brand engagement platforms. Goldsmith, Flynn and Clark (2011) conducted two studies of shopping activity, and found that consumers' liking for shopping was impacted positively by brand engagement in self-concept, a notion drawn from the work of Sprott et al. (2009) already referred to. They also established that the relationship between brand engagement and a liking for shopping was accounted for significantly by materialism.

#### **2.2.4. Brand Engagement in Brand Communities**

More than twenty years ago, Schouten and McAlexander (1995), in a seminal paper, defined "a sub-culture of consumption as a distinctive subgroup of society that self-selects on the basis of a shared commitment to a particular product class, brand, or consumption activity" (p.43). They describe the epic Harley Davidson "Posse Rides", in which owners of these motorcycles mingled freely with management, and made full use of the opportunity to tell executives what was great, right and wrong with "their" brand. The Harley-Davidson brand and the product were the common bond that held this community together, despite the fact that the community members came from very diverse demographic and economic backgrounds. These types of human groupings became known as "brand communities".

Brand communities are obviously important and of interest to both marketing practitioners and scholars. From a customer-experiential perspective when brands are the focal point of communities, they provide a fabric of relationships in which the customer is situated (McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig 2002). For these brands, customers are more than passive purchasers and users. They believe that their ownership of, and identity with the brand gives them significant power over it, and the sellers that make decisions regarding it. In simple terms they are fully "engaged" with their brands.

With the advent of the Internet as we know it today, in the mid-1990s, these communities moved online. Dholakia, Bagozzi and Pearo (2004, pp. 241–242) describe these online communities as "consumer groups that meet and interact online for the sake of achieving personal as well as shared goals of their members". When their focal point is a brand, we can refer to such a grouping as an "online brand community", which Muniz and O'Guinn (2001, p. 412) define as "a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand." Not surprisingly, the rise of

social media has emphasized the role of brand communities even more, with particular relevance to the notion of brand engagement.

The interaction between the concepts of brand community and brand engagement have also gained specific attention in the recent marketing literature. Raïes, Mühlbacher and Gavard-Perret (2015) have studied the differences in consumption community commitment between new- and longstanding community members, and found that this is to a large extent accounted for by brand engagement. These factors in turn are significantly related to brand loyalty. Arguing that there is a need among brand marketing scholars for a diverse set of motivational measures that best fit the context of their research, Baldus, Voorhees and Calantone (2015) developed and validated a scale to measure engagement in online brand communities. After conceptualizing online brand community commitment, as the compelling intrinsic motivations and individual would have to continue interacting with that social grouping, they identify 11 independent motivations that then form part of their scale.

The notion of a brand community is of course not only specific to the customers, consumers, users or aficionados of a brand. Conceivably, an organization's employees also represent an important and potentially engaged brand community: after all, they interact with the organization's brand on a daily basis as part of their jobs.

### **2.3. SOCIAL MEDIA AND BRAND ENGAGEMENT**

In the early days of the internet, which for most people began in the early- to mid-1990's (although the fundamental technology had been around for a few decades before that), individuals worldwide learned that they were able to interact with firms, organizations, and each other on the multimedia platform that became known as the World Wide Web. This evolutionary phase is sometimes referred to as Web 1.0. Most organizations rushed to have an Internet manifestation by converting their corporate brochures to simple websites. This online presence evolved rapidly to include not only communication, but also online coordination and commerce, with content ranging from service provision to news, and education to entertainment.

In the early years of the new millennium, just as organizations began to feel that they understood Web 1.0, Web 2.0 eventuated. The term Web 2.0 is credited to an O'Reilly Media Web 2.0 Conference in 2004, during which O'Reilly described

the Web 2.0 phenomenon as businesses embracing the Web as a platform and using its strengths; for example, for global audiences (Graham, 2005). Web 2.0 is best viewed as a series of application progressions rather than a completely new technology: everyone is now a publisher with access to a global audience, and it is individuals, more than organizations, who have exploited the platforms afforded by Web 2.0. Rather than merely retrieving and consuming information, as was the case of Web 1.0, individuals can now both create and consume information. In the early days of Web 2.0, Tapscott and Williams (2007) asserted that the economy of 'the new Web' depended on mass collaboration with economic democracy as an outcome.

According to Berthon et al. (2012), Web 2.0 has had two main consequences of importance to marketers: First, it has given rise to what has been termed 'social media,' and second, it has allowed the phenomenon that has been termed 'user generated content' (content created by individuals such as customers and employees, rather than firms or organizations) to flourish.

These authors argue that Web 2.0 technologies have caused three effects: (1) a shift in locus of activity from the desktop to the Web, and therefore also to other devices such as smartphones and tablets, (2) a shift in the locus of value production from the organization to the customer, and (3) a shift in the locus of power away from the organization to the individual. At the forefront of these technologies have been social media websites that, while none of them existed at the turn of the millennium, have become household names, and the go-to web daily destinations of billions of individuals worldwide. These include the social networking site Facebook, the microblogging website Twitter, and the video uploading and viewing platform YouTube. They also comprise more specialized platforms such as the travel recommendation website TripAdvisor, and the job information website Glassdoor. All these social media have one thing in common: the bulk of the content is generated not by organizations, but by individuals.

Thus, while social media comprise both the conduits and the content disseminated through interactions between individuals and organizations (Kietzman et al., 2011), it is overwhelmingly produced by individuals. As Berthon et al. (2012) state, Web 2.0 technologies transform broadcast media monologues (one to many) into social media dialogues (many to many).

Social media are highly accessible – anyone with an internet enabled device, and internet connectivity can access as well as contribute to them. They are also scalable, which means that they can be used to reach very large audiences

(Brogan, 2010; Zarella, 2010). They transform what were previously broadcast media monologues (one to many) into social media dialogues (many to many), and in doing so they support the democratization of knowledge and information, and transform individuals from mere content consumers into content producers. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p. 61) describe social media as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content.” As Hanna, Rohm, and Crittenden (2011) wrote, the real power of the social media ecosystem is that “we are all connected.”

Unsurprisingly, marketers have not been slow in attempting to understand and exploit social media as a tool to communicate with stakeholders, and more specifically as a vehicle through which to have stakeholders engage with brands.

### **2.3.1. Research on Social Media and Brand Engagement**

The evolution of social media and its role in marketing have been thoroughly explored by Lamberton and Stephen (2016) in a recent review article, with particular reference to social media’s capability to engage with consumers. Using keyword counts from the premier general marketing journals, these scholars track the changes in academic perspectives that have occurred, in order to gain a macro-level view of the shifting importance of topics related to social media since 2000. Two of the three key themes that emerge from this research are first, the role of social media to facilitate individual expression, and second, social media as a source of market intelligence. Stated differently, the implications of these two themes are first, that marketers should understand social media as a vehicle for brand engagement because stakeholders will use it to express themselves and their perspectives on brands. Secondly, that these expressions of self and brand engagement will be a valuable source of information for marketing decision makers. In the context of the research described in this study, what employees say about their organizations in social media such as Glassdoor needs to be understood by these organizations, and that this content becomes a valuable source of information for marketing decision makers, as well as an interesting and rich new source of data for marketing scholars.

Researchers have addressed a number of issues with regard to brand engagement in social media. These have included the interplay between brand equity and brand engagement in social media, the reactions of consumers to marketing strategies in social media, the development of scales to measure brand engagement in social media, and practical marketing strategies and tactics

for managing an organization's social media efforts. In a recent study, Hsu and Lawrence (2016) focus on the role of social media in product recall situations. Using an event study methodology of product recall announcements, they investigated the extent to which social media can negatively impact a firm's shareholder value. They also considered the extent to which the firm's brand equity and engagement in social media settings could diminish the negative effects of social media in the cases of recall situations. Their findings suggest that while, as expected, product recalls can have substantial negative effects on the firms suffering them, these impacts are significantly lower for those firms that have strong brand equity, regardless of the firms' engagement in social media during the recall. In simple terms, strong brand equity can protect a firm in the social media environment.

A significant attempt to clarify the role of social media in brand engagement is presented in the work of Hollebeek, Glynn and Brodie (2014). Conceptualizing consumer brand engagement as comprising the three dimensions of cognitive processing, affection and activation, these researchers empirically explore the nature of brand engagement in social media. Not only does this work provide a psychometrically validated scale that scholars can use to measure consumer brand engagement, the findings of their research also identify brand involvement' as an antecedent to brand engagement and consumer self-brand connection and brand usage intent as consequences thereof. The work is therefore not only of academic interest and value; it also has important implications for marketing practice.

Marketers are always searching for innovative and creative ways to segment markets, in order to target their strategies and offerings more finely to customers and other stakeholders. The work of Campbell, Ferraro and Sands (2014) sheds light on how consumers may be segmented with respect to their reactions to social network marketing. This research segmented consumers on the basis of their attitudes toward social network marketing and the association among psychological, economic, and socio-demographic covariates. They identify five consumer stereotypes with regard to social media use, groups that they term "Passives", "Talkers", "Hesitants", "Actives", and "Averse". These authors argue that there is a significant proportion of a market – around 40% - that can be effectively reached through social network marketing. This paper reinforces that it is problematic to collapse all users of social networks into one agglomerated mass. The work is valuable in that it "offers a more nuanced understanding of how consumers engage with social media by focusing on how consumers

engage with social network marketing and by employing three segmentation bases: brand engagement, purchase intention, and word of mouth” (p. 432).

Two papers in a practitioner-oriented journal offer advice to managers on how social media can be used to enhance brand engagement. Specifically in the environment of Facebook, Malhotra, Malhotra and See (2013) provide counsel to marketers on how to augment brand engagement and brand awareness in a target market. Among the various strategies that they identify, the authors emphasize the use of visual tools to express ideas, and argue that Facebook provides an excellent vehicle for educating customers. Mount and Garcia Martinez (2014) use the case of Nestlé’s famous Kit Kat chocolate bar to illustrate how social media can be used to reinvigorate an old brand. Again using Facebook, Nestlé successfully raised the brand engagement of young adults in the target market by allowing them to use the medium to vote on new Kit Kat flavors.

#### **2.4. BRAND ENGAGEMENT AND EMPLOYEES AS STAKEHOLDERS**

The management literature has long asserted, “that brands and human capital constitute some of the firm’s most important assets” (Wilden, Gudergan, and Lings, 2010: 57). More recently, Vomberg, Homburg and Bornemann (2014) have argued that while there have been separate streams in the marketing- and human resources management literatures focusing on these two capitals as valuable assets, (e.g. Farjoun, 1994; Mizik and Jacobson, 2008), this state of affairs limits our understanding of their potential inter-dependencies and contingencies. There is a need to study both in concert, for each impacts the other: Strong brands influence employees in a positive manner, and by living the brand, employees enhance it in the eyes of other stakeholders, especially customers.

Specifically in the context of the research presented in this study, namely the use of the social media job evaluation site Glassdoor.com, Dineen and Allen (2016) contrast the large number of social media sources enabling comparisons for consumers (e.g., TripAdvisor) with those facilitating evaluations for job seekers. Social media is making comparisons attainable not only for customers as stakeholders, but for employees as well. This means that not only will customers engage with brands on social media, but employees will as well. These authors argue that rankings of “best-places-to-work” and similar sources of information (almost entirely user generated content) are “a proliferating form of third party employment branding” (p.91). They also plead for a greater empirical and

theoretical understanding of how these sources of employment branding impact key human capital outcomes. Their extensive research finds that high ratings by employees on social media such as Glassdoor are associated with lower staff turnover rates, as well as higher quality applicant pools for vacant positions.

#### **2.4.1. The “Employee as Customer”: Internal Marketing**

In a recent article, Schaefer (2016) has asserted that the human resource management (HR) function in organizations needs to act more like marketing, not least because in progressive organizations and markets, HR compete just as fiercely for talent as marketing does for customers. Moreover, he argues that building employees’ brand engagement will help them to amplify the organization’s message. As he states, “On the marketing side, we frequently dream about networks of employees who post stories about our products, leading to massive new views to our content” (p.4.) What he doesn’t go on to observe, however, is that employees also post in social media about the jobs they do. When they post on websites like Glassdoor they affect the HR function’s ability to compete either successfully or unsuccessfully for talent just as surely as they impact on the marketing function’s ability to move products and services.

The notion of “internal marketing”, a term coined by Berry (1980), has been around for many years. Essentially, the argument is that the basic activities of marketing, including understanding customers, segmenting heterogeneous populations into more homogenous groups, conceptualizing the right offerings, assigning a value to them, assorting offerings to the places where they are needed and communicating to target markets, is just as relevant to the organization’s internal customers (its employees) as it is to its external ones (Pitt and Foreman, 1999). Almost thirty years ago, a major marketing textbook (Kotler, 1991, p. 20) was exhorting that an organization “must carry out internal marketing,” as well as external marketing, defining internal marketing as “the task of successfully hiring, training, and motivating able employees to serve the customer well.” It emphasized that internal marketing must indeed precede external marketing, as it makes no sense to promise excellent service before the organization’s staff is ready and able to provide it.

Advertising has been the marketing tool most widely used in targeting employees – for many years organizations have utilized job advertisements, particularly in the “situations vacant” sections of newspapers, to attract good candidates for open positions. Lay observers of mass media advertising might wonder why large multi-national consulting firms such as Accenture, McKinseys and KPMG

spend considerable sums on television- and outdoor advertising, when the vast majority of ordinary consumers would never need, let alone afford, the services these firms provide. The purpose of these ads is to build brands, so that highly skilled professionals, the kinds of people these firms want to recruit, will not only be aware of these brands, but also be interested in them and tempted to work for them – in simple terms to begin to engage with the brand. Viewed from a brand equity perspective, Ewing, Pitt, de Bussy and Berthon (2002) argue that the concept of brand equity should be expanded to encompass how a firm's brand, its name and symbol add to (or subtract from) the value provided by the firm and/or that firm's current and potential employees. These authors refer to 'employment branding', which can be viewed either as a separate construct of brand equity, or simply a synergistic addition to overall brand equity.

So we have moved from simple job advertising, through internal marketing, and expanded marketing concepts such as brand equity to include employees as employee branding, or employee brand equity. More recently, scholars, notably Kumar and Pansari (2014, 2016) have begun to observe that it is not just customers that engage with organizations and their brands, other stakeholders, and employees in particular, do so as well. Hence, both marketing and management scholars have begun to give attention to employee brand engagement.

#### **2.4.2. Employees and Brand Engagement**

Moving forward from internal marketing, management and marketing scholars began to give specific attention to employee engagement with corporate brands about twelve years ago. Hardaker and Fill (2005), noted that the extant literature at the time tended to omit the message orientation necessary to help employees engage in the corporate brand development process. They exploited the research opportunity afforded by the decision of a large UK public sector services organization to privatize. Using a case-based research approach, they studied the role of employees within the new organization and how these would contribute toward the development of the new corporate brand. In very similar research, Alloza (2008) used the case of BBVA, a 150-year-old company, during the time of a merger and acquisition. The learning points he emphasizes are that measures of key indicators of employee engagement, customer loyalty and brand reputation for all stakeholders needed to be integrated, and the results obtained by the organization confirmed the value of this.



Arguing that employees play an important role in building corporate brand equity not only at work, but also in their external interactions with others, with friends and family, Morokane, Chiba and Kleyn (2016) studied brand knowledge and engagement of employees in predicting their proclivity to endorse their organization's brand within the confines of a large South African retail and merchant bank. They found that, not only do both employee engagement and brand knowledge play an important role in the employees' propensity to act as brand ambassadors, but that engagement also moderates the relationship between brand knowledge and this predisposition to endorse.

## **2.5. CONCLUSION**

This chapter has considered the literature in three areas, and how they relate to the research in this study, namely brand engagement, social media, and employee engagement with brands. Brand engagement was broadly defined as "how stakeholders involve or commit themselves emotionally to or with the known identity of an organization in terms of what products and services it offers as well as the essence of what the *organization* stands for in terms of service and other emotional, non-tangible stakeholder concerns." Brand engagement was also discussed in more detail under the headings of its conceptualization and definition, its operationalization and measurement, its outcomes, and how it works in brand communities.

Then, social media were introduced and their relevance to marketing in general, and to brand engagement in particular, were examined. As a manifestation of what has become known as Web 2.0, social media are viewed as a series of application progressions rather than a completely new technology: everyone is now a publisher with access to a global audience, and it is individuals, more than organizations, who have exploited the platforms afforded by Web 2.0.

Next, the broader literature on employee brand relationships was considered, with specific attention given to how employees as stakeholders engage with brands and why this is important.

In the next chapter, the literature on how content analysis can be used to explore and understand employee brand engagement is considered. A theoretical framework to explore employee brand engagement on social media is presented, and the hypotheses to be tested in this research are formulated.

## **CHAPTER III: UNDERSTANDING BRAND ENGAGEMENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA USING CONTENT ANALYSIS**

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

The previous chapter established that employee brand engagement on social media is a key success factor for companies. This chapter focuses on how to best understand and interpret this form of engagement.

More than 90% of the world's data has been created in the very recent past. In 2013 it was reported that the great bulk of the world's data had been generated in the previous two or three years (cf. Weinberg, Davis and Berger, 2013). This data is generally not in the form that most people understand as "data", or numbers: nowadays most data is in the form of text, images, and video. The sudden surge in the increase in the world's data is almost entirely due to the advent of social media. That is, the data is in the form of posts, comments, blogs, pictures, video, and short verbal rhetoric created by billions of individuals around the world. This is posted to social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, as well as more specialized social media including travel review sites such as TripAdvisor, job appraisal sites such as Glassdoor.com, and the app review platforms for Apple iPhones and Android devices. The data represents a massive treasure trove for marketing scholars and practitioners who are interested in analyzing stakeholder (including customers and employees) attitudes, emotions, engagement and sentiment. However most of the traditional tools of marketing research are not appropriate for analyzing this kind of data. It does not lend itself easily to statistical manipulation in the same way that traditional marketing data such as that gathered by surveys, and interviews with structured scales do.

Some researchers have turned to computerized content analysis to analyze this data. In this way it is possible to decipher much of what lies behind the text that consumers produce. Various tools have been developed for this purpose. However it is necessary that researchers have confidence in the theoretical foundations that lay behind these tools. In the next section therefore, a theoretical framework is introduced, namely Hart's theory of word choice and verbal tone.

In this chapter, a brief overview of content analysis is presented. Then a theory of word choice and verbal tone is discussed in detail, which forms the basis of the

hypotheses to be presented in this study. Based on this, the hypotheses to be tested are formulated.

### **3.2 CONTENT ANALYSIS – A BRIEF OVERVIEW**

Content analysis is the common term used for a range of techniques for gathering and analyzing the content of a piece of text or document. This content may include words, meanings, pictures, symbols, ideas, themes, or any message that can be communicated (Neuman, 2003). It also represents a range of methods for codifying the contents of a document into various themes or categories, depending on the criteria selected by the researcher (Weber, 1988). Content analysis is a commonly used method in social science studies. A plethora of research on content analysis in the marketing field has, for example, focused on searching for meaning in magazines (see Tse, Belk and Zhou, 1989; Gross and Sheth, 1989; Kolbe and Burnett, 1991; Kolbe and Albanese, 1996), television advertisements (Resnik and Stern, 1977; Dowling, 1980) and best-selling books (Harvey, 1953; Mullins and Kopelman, 1984).

Cooper and Schindler (2003) contend that content analysis is a flexible, comprehensive research tool that can either be a general methodology or a specific problem-solving technique. An interesting question is whether content analysis is a qualitative or quantitative technique? Scholars such as Bryman and Bell (2003) and Berelson (1952) argue that it is quantitative. Other researchers (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Boyle, 1994; Tesch, 1990) make a qualitative claim for content analysis. A third camp sit on the fence, and argue that content analysis is dynamic in nature and that it can be both qualitative and quantitative (Marshall and Rossman, 1999; Cooper and Schindler, 2003; Krippendorff, 2004). Krippendorff (2004, p.19) contends “all reading of texts is qualitative, even when certain characteristics of a text are later converted into numbers.”

Recent developments in computerized content analysis using software such as Leximancer (e.g. Campbell et al., 2011b) and WordStat (e.g. Campbell et al., 2011a; Pitt et al., 2007) reinforce the dynamic nature of content analysis. The words of individuals can be analysed (qualitatively, or by means of artificially imposed frameworks), and turned into quantitative data that can be analysed by means of sophisticated statistical tools. Using computers to facilitate qualitative data analysis has been given various names such as *computer-assisted data analysis* (see MacLaran and Catterall, 2002); *computer-supported data analysis* (see Romano, Madison, Sullivan, Swindler and Tipton, 2003) and *computer-facilitated data analysis* (see Wolfe, Gephart and Johnson, 1993).

### **3.2.1 Three Different Approaches to Content Analysis**

Short and Palmer (2008) classify content analysis methodologies into three broad types (see also, Deffner, 1986; Morris, 1994). First, human scored systems entail training human coders to classify text according to certain pre-determined categories (see for example, Hirschman's (1987) work on coding personals ads). Under this approach, the researcher pre-determines what aspects of the text will serve as the units of analysis (e.g., a word, phrase, sentence, paragraph, full text). Then, categories are developed for classification and coding rules are developed for each category. More than one coder is then trained to classify, and the results of the independent coders are then compared statistically to determine the overall reliability of the coding. For example, Short and Palmer (2003) content analyzed CEO's letters to shareholders by sentence clause to code different organizational performance referents such as use of internal comparators (e.g., previous year's sales) or external comparators (e.g., competitor performance).

Second, individual word count systems classify text into a number of semantically equivalent categories and then use frequency counts to determine the relative importance of each category in a text (Weber, 1988). For example, Pitt et al (2007) used WordStat word count software to tally and allocate words on tourism websites, and to sort these under the five dimensions of brand personality (Aaker, 1997) in order to determine how the tourism websites of different countries were positioned differently from each other.

Third, modern artificial intelligence systems incorporate features that consider the syntax and lexicon of words (Rosenberg, Schnurr, and Oxman, 1990). Thus, there is a mechanism to resolve words with more than a single meaning. For example, IBM's Watson natural language processing software (<http://www.ibm.com/watson/developercloud/services-catalog.html>) is able to deduce the tone of a document and infer behavioural traits of the creator, in terms of such variables as personality, emotions and sentiment, values and needs.

Any attempt at content analysis of a large corpus of text requires a strong theoretical framework to serve as a conceptual guideline. Hart's (1984a; 1984b; 2000; 2001) theory of word choice and verbal tone was selected for this purpose for a number of reasons. First, it is strongly grounded in a fundamental series of questions that can be posed of any piece of text: If it is to be truly understood,

what questions should be asked of it? This results in the identification of a number of dimensions, and variables that can be calculated. This means that measures can be assigned to the various facets of a piece of text. Second, Hart's theory has been used extensively in the business and management literatures (see Short and Palmer, 2002), which gives credence to its application in this regard.

### **3.3 HART'S THEORY (1984a; 1984b; 2000; 2001) OF DOCUMENT CONTENT: WORD CHOICE AND VERBAL TONE**

The political scientist and communications scholar Roderick Hart (1984a; 1984b; 2000; 2001) developed his theory of document content by posing a fundamental question: If only five questions could be asked of a given passage, which five questions would provide the most robust understanding? Hart was trying to make sense of the speeches of presidents and presidential candidates in the USA, and needed a common base from which to analyze and explain the words and documents of various politicians. His theory focuses on the subtle power of word choice and verbal tone. The theoretical framework is in fact culled from other work in linguistic theory conducted by a number of social thinkers, and so in that sense Hart's work integrates these into a comprehensive theory. Hart posits that the five most important themes in a piece of text or document can, if analyzed, provide significant insight into the nature of that piece of text or document. Moreover, Hart's theory argues that a further four fundamental variables can be calculated from any piece of text, namely, how insistent it is, how much variety it exhibits, to what extent the text embellishes, and how simple or complex the text is. These are described and briefly discussed below.

#### **3.3.1 Fundamental Variables**

In answering the question, "If only five questions could be asked of a given passage, which five questions would provide the most robust understanding?" Hart suggests that these queries should be posed:

1. To what extent is the text certain?
2. How optimistic (or pessimistic) is the piece of text?
3. To what extent does the piece of text exhibit activity?
4. How realistic is the piece of text?
5. To what extent does the text communicate communitarian concepts (in other words to what extent is there commonality)?

The first of the variables Hart argues provides deep insight into a piece of text is *Certainty*. *Certainty* derives from Wendell Johnson's (1946) work on general semantics. Johnson was concerned with how language becomes rigid, and what the effects of this can be on a reader or an audience. *Certainty* involves language and words that indicate resoluteness, inflexibility, completeness, and a tendency to speak with authority (cf. Ober, Zhao, Davis, and Alexander, 1999). In Hart's DICTION content analysis software (see <http://127.0.0.1:65075/help/index.jsp>), *certainty* is measured as a composite of eight other variables as follows:

[*Tenacity + Leveling + Collectives + Insistence.*] - [*Numerical Terms + Ambivalence + Self Reference + Variety.*]

The second major component in a piece of text revolves around the notion of *optimism*, based on the work of James Barber (1992). Hart describes *optimism* as language that endorses an individual, a group, a concept, or an event. Barber (1992) noted that optimism was a key dimension to understanding the nature of the speaker or the composer of the piece of text (see also Hayward, Rindova, and Pollock, 2004). In Hart's DICTION software, *optimism* is measured as a composite of six other variables as follows:

[*Praise + Satisfaction + Inspiration*] - [*Blame + Hardship + Denial*]

Hart's third key dimension, *activity*, is based on the research of Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum (1957). *Activity* has to do with language that is about movement, change, and the implementation of ideas and the avoidance of inertia. In Hart's DICTION software, *activity* is measured as a composite of seven other variables as follows:

[*Aggression + Accomplishment + Communication + Motion*] –  
[*Cognitive Terms + Passivity + Embellishment*]

John Dewey's (1954) work on pragmatism formed the basis for Hart's fourth dimension of text, namely *realism*. *Realism* has to do with the language that describes tangible, immediate, and recognizable issues. In Hart's DICTION software, *realism* is measured as a composite of eight other variables as follows: [Familiarity + Spatial Awareness + Temporal Awareness + Present Concern + Human Interest + Concreteness] - [Past Concern + Complexity]

Finally, *commonality*, Hart's fifth master variable in understanding a piece of text is based on the work of Etzioni (1993) and Bellah, Madison, Sullivan, Swindler and Tipton (1991). *Commonality* has to do with language that communicates communitarian concepts. Specifically it entails language that highlights the agreed-upon values of a group of individuals and rejects language that is

idiosyncratic in terms of engagement. In Hart's DICTION software, *commonality* is measured as a composite of six other variables as follows:

$$[Centrality + Cooperation + Rapport] - [Diversity + Exclusion + Liberation]$$

The five questions posed above enable the identification of the dimensions of any piece of text. There are also a series of calculations that can be done for any piece of text. These are discussed next.

### 3.3.2 Calculated Variables

Hart (1984a; 1984b; 2000; 2001) also incorporates variables that he calls "calculated variables", or variables that can be mathematically computed from a piece of text, into his theory. These are all based on unique theoretical underpinnings and can be assigned scores based on any specific patterns in a piece of text.

The first calculated variable is *insistence*, which has to do with the use of repeated words, and is a measure of the extent to which codes are restricted and semantic "contentedness" is achieved (Short and Palmer, 2002; Hart, 2001). The assumption here is that where key terms are repeated, a preference for a limited, ordered world is indicated. It will be noted that *insistence* is also a component of the fundamental dimension, *certainty*.

The second calculated variable is called *variety*. This is based on Johnson's (1946) type-token ratio, which divides the number of different words in a passage by the total number of words. Thus, a high score on variety would indicate that the speaker or a writer is avoiding overstatement and has a preference for precision. It will be noted that *variety* is also a component of the fundamental dimension, *certainty*.

The third calculated variable is that of *embellishment*. *Embellishment* is computed by dividing the number of adjectives by the number of verbs, and is derived from David Boder's (1940) notion that a lot of modification in a document slows down the reader or the audience's ability to interpret, because the text deemphasizes human and material action. It will be noted that *embellishment* is also a component of the fundamental dimension, *activity*.

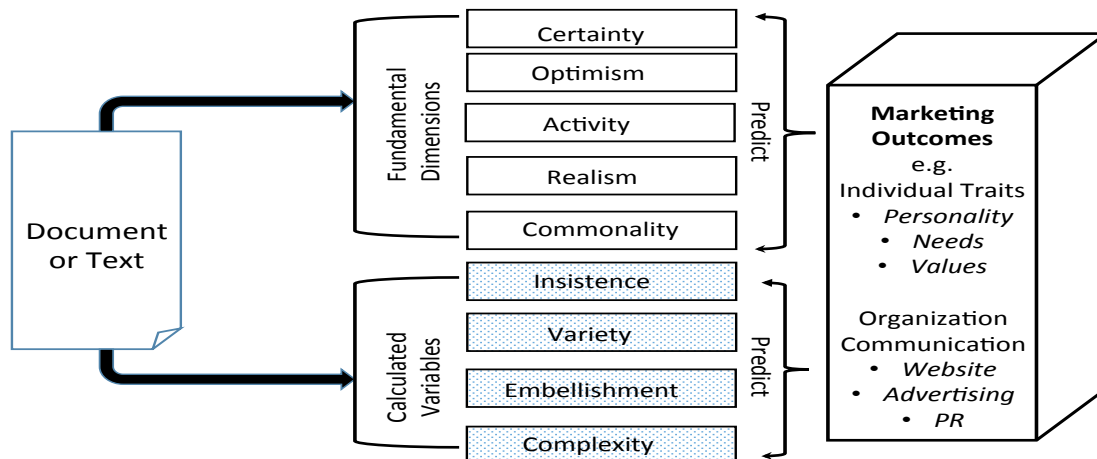
The final calculated variable is that of *complexity*. *Complexity* in a piece of text is measured by dividing the average number of characters per word in a given input file by the total number of words. Akin to well-known notions of readability in the

communication literature, this is based on Flesch's (1951) conception that convoluted phrasings make a text's ideas abstract and its implications unclear for the reader or for the audience. It will be noted that *complexity* is also a component of the fundamental dimension, *realism*.

Hart's perspective on word choice and verbal tone is illustrated in the theoretical framework in figure 3.1 below. The theory argues that the fundamental components of a document, or any piece of rhetoric or text, can be classified into one of five fundamental dimensions, namely certainty, optimism, activity, realism or commonality. In Hart's content analysis software, DICTION, words that match the dictionaries set up for these variables will then be sorted under the appropriate dimension, in order to calculate a score for the piece of text on that dimension. The piece of text as a whole is then analyzed by means of calculation to arrive at the calculated variables.

From this theoretical framework it can then be posited that the fundamental dimensions and/or the calculated variables can then be used to interpret any piece of marketing or related text, such as a job evaluation on a social network site. By developing scores for it, researchers are then able to compare various pieces of text. By extension these scores could then be used as either independent or dependent variables in other analyses of interest. In the next section, attention is briefly given to fundamental types of content analysis.

Figure 3.1: Hart's Theory of Word Choice and Verbal Tone: Theoretical Framework Applied to Marketing





### 3.3.3 Understanding Hart's Theory using DICTION

Hart's theory of word choice and verbal tone (1984a; 1984b; 2000; 2001; Short and Palmer, 2002) provides a strong conceptual framework that can be used to study any piece of text, whether that text be written, or verbal and recorded. It gets to the heart of analysing a piece of text by positing five fundamental questions that enable a researcher to classify, categorize and characterize that piece of text and then not only compare it to other pieces of text, but also to determine the relationships between that piece of text and other variables associated with it. It also argues that certain fundamental characteristics, or variables, can be calculated for a piece of text (Hart, 1984a; 1984b; 2000; 2001).

Hart (2000; 2001) used this theoretical framework, along with the four "calculated variables" referred to above, to construct the DICTION content analysis package. This software can take any piece of text, and then using dictionaries that contain many thousands of synonyms for the dimensions and their sub-constructs, it can count and score the piece of text on those dimensions and sub-constructs, and the calculated variables. For example, it could take two letters composed by different authors, and score them each on the dimensions of commonality and optimism, and permit comparisons to be made.

Simultaneously, it can also score the piece of text on the calculated variables of *insistence* (the extent to which it uses repeated words); *variety* (the number of different words in a passage divided by the total number of words); *embellishment* (the number of adjectives display by the number of verbs); and *complexity* (the average number of characters per word in a given input file divided by the total number of words, akin to how convoluted the phrasing in the text is). Thus, for example, by computing the "calculated" variables, it can indicate which author was more insistent, or which author embellished less, but was more difficult to read.

DICTION is therefore extremely useful in cases where researchers need to analyze large amounts of text simultaneously in order to make comparisons and associations in a structured way. It has been used in management and marketing, for example, to study the content of mission statements (Short and Palmer (2008), and the overall content of wine tourism websites (Morrish, Pitt and Vella, 2017). If the job review made by an individual employee on a social medium such as Glassdoor is regarded as engagement with the employer brand, then DICTION can also be used to analyze that content. DICTION's dimensions and calculated variables provide metrics by which that engagement can be

evaluated. When a large number of reviews are available, then comparisons can be made between them, and where they can be categorized independently either externally (e.g. a job review by an employee of an organization with a job ranking publication that ranks the employer as either very desirable to work for or undesirable) or internally (the employee awards the employer a high (e.g. 5 star) or low (e.g. 1 star) rating). In this way the nature of the employee brand engagement as characterized by the DICTION dimensions and calculated variables can be compared across organizations, and the significance of the differences between highly- and lowly ranked organizations, and highly- and lowly rated organizations can be explored.

### **3.4 RANKING AND RATING EMPLOYERS**

Employers would obviously prefer to have their employees highly engaged with their brands in a positive way, and in order to be able to do this would find some kind of benchmarking valuable. There are two ways of doing this: One would be to consider a firm's brand against other brands that are ranked independently. The other would be to compare how employees rate a brand, using some kind of system like a star rating. This study employs both methods in order to make comparisons. First, it uses an independent ranking of B2B brands (Brandwatch, 2015), which enables highly ranked brands to be compared to low ranked brands on the dimensions and calculated variables of word choice and verbal tone. Second, it uses the ratings made by employees of their employing firms that accompany their job reviews. This enables highly rated (five star) brands to be compared to low rated (one star) brands on the dimensions and calculated variables of word choice and verbal tone.

### **3.5 FORMULATION OF HYPOTHESES**

The literature reviewed suggests that not only is customers' engagement with brands important, but that the brand engagement of other stakeholders, especially employees, should also be understood and taken into consideration. This is particularly true in B2B situations, where not only is customer engagement with the brand rarely considered but that employee engagement with the brand has been largely ignored in the scholarly literature. Furthermore, much of the engagement that employees have with brands today occur in social media sites such as Glassdoor, and this content can therefore be analyzed in order to draw conclusions about the nature of the engagement in both highly- and lowly ranked organizations, as well as in the case of both high- and low

ratings. This enables the formulation of a number of hypotheses that will shed light on the overall research question to be answered in this research, namely:

*How does the brand engagement (via social media) of employees of highly ranked and rated employers differ from employees' social media brand engagement with low ranked and rated employers, and does this engagement vary by employee review rating?*

The hypotheses to be tested in this research can be formulated as follows:

Because the nature of brand engagement in highly ranked and lowly ranked B2B firms may differ with regard to Hart's dimensions of word choice and verbal tone, it is therefore hypothesized as follows:

*H<sub>1</sub>: The word choice and verbal tone dimensions of the reviews of employees of highly ranked B2B firms will differ significantly from those of lowly ranked B2B firms.*

Similarly, because the nature of brand engagement in highly ranked and lowly ranked B2B firms may differ with regard to Hart's calculated variables of word choice and verbal tone, it is therefore hypothesized as follows:

*H<sub>2</sub>: The word choice and verbal tone dimensions of the reviews of employees of highly rated B2B firms will differ significantly from those of lowly rated B2B firms.*

Furthermore, because the nature of brand engagement in highly rated and lowly rated B2B firms may differ with regard to Hart's calculated variables of word choice and verbal tone, it is therefore hypothesized as follows

*H<sub>3</sub>: The word choice and verbal tone calculated variables of the reviews of employees of highly ranked B2B firms will differ significantly from those of lowly ranked B2B firms.*

Finally, because the nature of brand engagement in highly rated and lowly rated B2B firms may differ with regard to Hart's calculated variables of word choice and verbal tone, it is therefore hypothesized as follows:

*H<sub>4</sub>: The word choice and verbal tone calculated variables of the reviews of employees of highly rated B2B firms will differ significantly from those of lowly rated B2B firms.*

### **3.6. CONCLUSION**

This chapter has presented an overview of content analysis as a research tool. Then, a theory of word choice and verbal tones (Hart, 1984a; 1984b; 2000; 2001) was presented and discussed in detail. Hart argues that five fundamental questions can be asked of a piece of text, such as an employee's review of the organization they work for in social media, in order to give the greatest insight into that piece of text. In addition, four variables can be arithmetically calculated for that piece of text, which provide additional insight. The literature review enabled four primary hypotheses to be formulated that can then be tested in the research conducted in this thesis.

The following chapter outlines the methodology employed in the current research. This includes a description of the research design and method employed, all sampling decisions made, the data sources used and the data collection procedures.

## **CHAPTER IV: METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1. INTRODUCTION**

The previous chapters provided an overview of the extant literatures on brand engagement, social media and employee-brand engagement, as well as a theoretical lens, namely Hart's theory (1984a; 1984b; 2000; 2001) of word choice and verbal tone, through which to explore employee brand engagement in social media. The hypotheses to be tested were then formulated and justified in accordance with the existing literature.

This chapter outlines the methodology followed in the research. The next section briefly reiterates the approach and contextualizes the research, and includes a review of the research question and hypotheses to be explored. An outline of the procedure followed is provided next, and the research procedures and methods are discussed. The data sources are explained in detail, as well as the methods for gleaning the data from these sources. The data analysis techniques used to test the hypotheses are also identified and described.

### **4.2. RESEARCH PURPOSE AND CONTEXT**

The current research considers work in four broad areas, namely brand engagement (e.g. Antonucci, 2011; Hollebeek, 2011a; Hoeffler and Keller, 2002); stakeholder engagement with particular reference to employees as stakeholders (e.g. Kumar and Pansari, 2016; Wilden, Gudergan, and Lings, 2010; Vomberg, Homburg and Bornemann, 2014), social media (e.g. Lamberton and Stephen, 2016; Berthon et al., 2012; Kietzman et al., 2011), and the nature of word choice and verbal tone (Hart, 1984a; 1984b; 2000; 2001). Its intention is to examine how the employees of B2B firms engage with their firms' brands in social media, and to explore this engagement through the lens of a theory of word choice and verbal tone.

This research was conducted using the publicly available data to be found on large social media websites. In this case, the social media website Glassdoor was used. Like most social media, Glassdoor is not bound to a particular country – employees from all over the world are able to access it and post content on it in the form of reviews, questions and ratings. It has become the job market equivalent of the social media travel website TripAdvisor – most of the content is generated by users, not the firm itself.

#### 4.2.1. Research Question

The current research is guided by the following research question:

*How does the brand engagement (via social media) of employees of highly ranked and rated employers differ from employees' social media brand engagement with low ranked and rated employers, and does this engagement vary by employee review rating?*

In order to answer the above research question, four hypotheses have been formulated, to be used in statistical testing procedures. These are highlighted below.

*H<sub>1</sub>: The word choice and verbal tone dimensions of the reviews of employees of highly ranked B2B firms will differ significantly from those of lowly ranked B2B firms.*

*H<sub>2</sub>: The word choice and verbal tone dimensions of the reviews of employees of highly rated B2B firms will differ significantly from those of lowly rated B2B firms.*

*H<sub>3</sub>: The word choice and verbal tone calculated variables of the reviews of employees of highly ranked B2B firms will differ significantly from those of lowly ranked B2B firms.*

*H<sub>4</sub>: The word choice and verbal tone calculated variables of the reviews of employees of highly rated B2B firms will differ significantly from those of lowly rated B2B firms.*

At this stage an important point should be reiterated, and clarified once more: the “ranking” of an employee firm refers to its ranking against other similar firms by an independent source; the “rating” of a firm refers to the overall ratings afforded to it by employees in the format of number of stars awarded, where one star equates to a very low rating and five stars equates to a very high rating.

#### 4.3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

This study employs an exploratory research design focusing on qualitative data. This is because the problem to be addressed has not been studied more clearly before, and neither have priorities been established previously (Shields and Rangarjan, 2013). This is most appropriate for this study because hitherto data

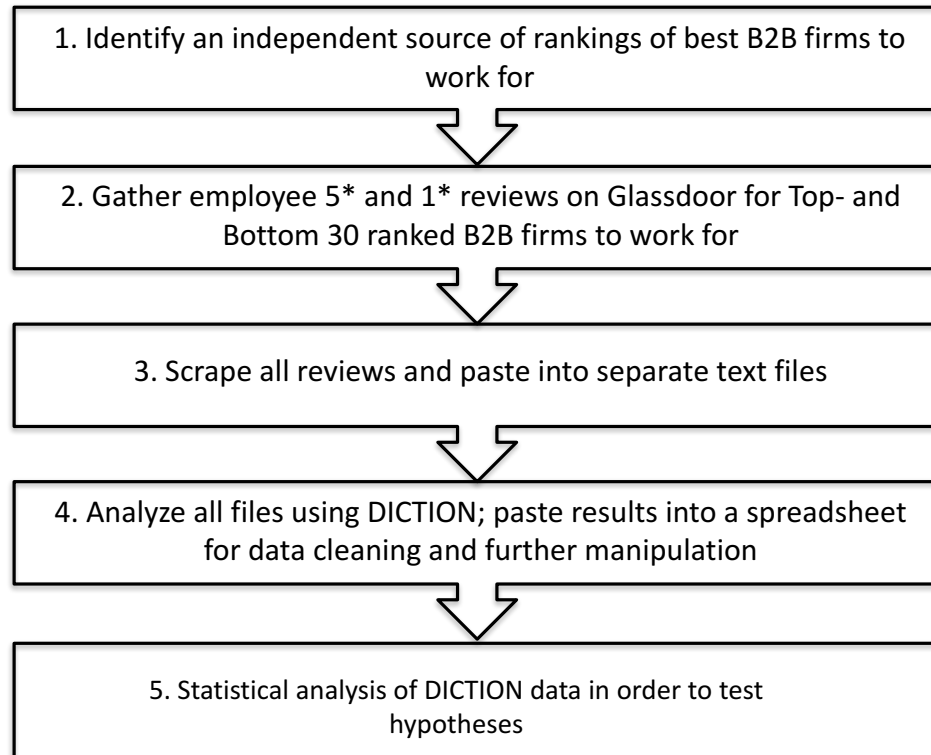
from specialist social media has not been used to study employee brand engagement, nor has content analysis software been used in this regard.

#### 4.4 THE RESEARCH PROCESS

As previously explained, the research in this study follows an exploratory approach. A number of other approaches could have been followed in order to explore brand engagement in social media by the employees of B2B firms. For example, a large sample of employees of various B2B firms could have been surveyed using one of the scales to measure brand engagement, or an amended version thereof, discussed in the literature review in the previous chapter. This would have permitted the research to be generalized, but it would not have provided any context or “richness”, or precision (McGrath, 1981). Furthermore, in this type of study, respondents would be indicating how they *feel* about engaging with brands, or how they *might* engage with brands, but this could very likely be different from how they *actually* engage with brands. Alternatively, either depth interviews with employees of B2B firms could have been conducted, or a series of focus groups held, in which employees of B2B firms could be required to talk about their engagement with employer brands in their own words. This would indeed have provided the richness and context that McGrath (1981) refers to, but at the expense of generalizability and precision. The small numbers of respondents typically used in qualitative research approaches such as in-depth interviews and focus groups would provide a lot of detail, but it would not be possible to generalize this data in any way. It might even have been possible to set up a number of controlled experiments in which actual employees of B2B firms could have had their sentiments manipulated in order to test the effects, or university students could have played the roles of employees in order to assess outcomes. This would certainly enable the research to be controlled, thus providing precision (McGrath, 1981). However, this approach would detract from the realism, richness and context that is desired, and the results would have been very difficult to generalize.

The approach followed here overcomes the limitations of surveys by providing richness and context (it uses the actual words of employees engaging with employer brands). It solves the problem of a lack of realism, richness, context and generalizability that an experimental approach would have occasioned. It also affords generalizability because of the very large samples used. The methodology followed in this study is illustrated as a series of five steps in figure 4.1 below. In the following sections, each of these steps is discussed in more detail.

Figure 4.1: Methodology- The Research Process used in this Study



#### **4.4.1. Step 1 - Identification of an independent source of rankings of best B2B firms to work for**

A fundamental intention of the research described here was to be able to distinguish whether there were any differences in the nature of employee brand engagement in highly- versus lowly ranked B2B firms. One way of doing this would simply to have been to use the overall “star” rating awarded to an employer firm by an employee reviewing that employer firm on social media. The problem with this however, is that it is very likely that an employee who awards a high rating to a brand also engages favorably with that brand and vice versa. There is therefore the possibility of common methods bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff, 2003) in this type of research. Ideally, then it is preferable to have rankings of firms from a separate and independent source from the ratings of these firms.



Therefore, a search was made to ascertain the rankings of the 30 best and the 30 worst B2B companies to work for. These numbers are obviously arbitrary and convenient, and more or less firms in both categories could have been chosen, but it was reasoned that 30 firms in each category would provide sufficient data for analysis. A study by Brandwatch (2015) was identified as the source of this ranking. “Brandwatch is one of the world’s leading social intelligence companies. Its social media listening and analytics technology platform gathers millions of online conversations every day and provides users with the tools to analyze them, empowering brands and agencies to make smarter, data-driven business decisions”, (Brandwatch, 2015, p.52). Data for the Brandwatch report was gathered by the firm using its social media monitoring platform Brandwatch Analytics. The report uses this platform to search for mentions of a B2B brand from over 90 million web sources such as news portals, social networks, blogs, and forums. Brandwatch then ranks the top 200 B2B brands according to their social media presence.

The top 30 of the 200 B2B brands were chosen to represent the “high ranking” B2B brands on social media, and the bottom 30 of the 200 brands were chosen to represent the “low ranking” B2B brands. In a sense it is not strictly accurate to refer to “best” and “worst” B2B brands in this context, rather it would be more correct to refer to the top 30- and the bottom 171-200 B2B brands. Brands 171-200 are not necessarily “bad” or low performing brands, they simply do not score as well on social media presence as do the top brands. However, for the sake of simplicity this study refers to the “high ranking” and “low ranking” B2B brands

#### **4.4.2. Step 2 - Gather employee 5\* and 1\* reviews on Glassdoor for Top- and Bottom 30 ranked B2B firms to work for**

The social media website Glassdoor ([www.glassdoor.com](http://www.glassdoor.com)) was used as the source of data for both the brand engagement, expressed in employee’s reviews of their B2B employers, and the employee ratings (from one- to five stars, where 1 star = a very bad firm to work for and 5 = a very good firm to work for). Glassdoor is described briefly in the section below.

##### **4.4.2.1. Glassdoor.com**

Glassdoor was cofounded in 2007 by Tim Besse, Robert Hohman, and Rich Barton (also founder of the travel website Expedia). The idea came from a brainstorming session between the founders, when Hohman relayed the story of

accidentally leaving the results of an employee survey on the printer while working at Expedia. They began to think about what would have happened if the results had gotten out into the public, and had the idea that if the material had indeed been revealed publicly, it could have been a service to those looking to make a career decision (Winfield, 2014).

According to its website ([https://www.glassdoor.ca/about/index\\_input.htm](https://www.glassdoor.ca/about/index_input.htm)) Glassdoor is an online social media website that holds a database of millions of company reviews by employees past and present, CEO approval ratings by employees and peers, salary reports, interview reviews and questions by both successful and unsuccessful applicants, benefits reviews, office photos and more. It is much more than merely a job advertisement website such as Monster.com, and its main purpose is not merely to recruit on behalf of client organizations. Its main purpose is rather to share information about jobs and employers, among those who know companies best — the employees.

Obviously there are many thousands of jobs advertised on the website as well, and this is how the company generates revenues. However, the value to users is that they don't only get to see which employers are hiring, they are also able to read first hand from other employees what it would be like to work for a particular employer, what the interview would be like, how much they could earn, and what benefits they could expect to receive. It therefore serves a very similar purpose to other specialized social media such as TripAdvisor. Just as a potential tourist could make travel decisions by reading hotel and restaurant reviews and accessing star ratings, potential job seekers can read employer reviews and access ratings of firms on Glassdoor. Glassdoor is also available via its mobile app on both iOS and Android platforms.

#### **4.4.2.2 Identifying Reviews from Glassdoor.com**

Targets were set for the following:

- To identify 100 five star reviews on Glassdoor from each of the 30 top ranked- and each of the 30 bottom ranked B2B firms according to Brandwatch (2015). In other words, in total, 3,000 reviews of the highly ranked B2B firms with five star ratings, and 3,000 reviews of the lowest ranked B2B firms with five star ratings were sought.
- To identify 100 one star reviews on Glassdoor from each of the 30 top ranked- and each of the 30 bottom ranked B2B firms according to Brandwatch (2015). In other words 3,000 reviews of the highest ranked

B2B firms with one star ratings, and 3,000 reviews of the lowest ranked B2B firms with five star ratings.

As it turned out, these targets could not be met entirely, as not all of the firms (both highest- and lowest ranked) had 100 five star ratings and/or one star ratings. Therefore as many as possible reviews were identified in each case: For highest ranked firms, 2,315 five star and 1,983 one star reviews; for lowest ranked firms, 1,013 five star and 1,025 one star reviews were identified. Thus while the targets were not met, the study still ended up with very large samples of reviews in all four instances.

#### **4.4.3. Step 3 - Scrape all reviews and paste into separate text files**

Each of the reviews identified on Glassdoor was “scraped” – captured by copying and pasting the words from the review into a separate text file. Each of these text files was then separately labeled so that it could be identified, categorized (as a “Highest ranked, five star”, “Highest ranked, one star”, “Lowest ranked, five star” or “Lowest ranked, one star” review respectively), and referred to if necessary. This activity prepared the data for the next step in the analysis process, namely analysis by DICTION software to compute the five dimensions, and four calculated variables that comprise word choice and verbal tone.

#### **4.4.4. Step 4 - Analyze all files using DICTION; paste results into a spreadsheet for data cleaning and further manipulation**

All of the reviews – a total of 6336 – were simultaneously read and analyzed by the DICTION content analysis software package. DICTION is described in more detail in the section below.

##### **4.4.4.1. DICTION content analysis software**

DICTION is a computer-aided text analysis program for determining the tone of a verbal message. It searches a passage for five general “features” (the five dimensions of text according to Hart’s theory) as well as thirty-five sub-features (each of which contributes to the dimensions). It can process a variety of English language texts using a 10,000-word corpus, or master dictionary. Users can also create their own dictionaries and use these on DICTION if required. DICTION produces reports about the texts it processes and also writes the results to numeric files for later statistical analysis. Output options include raw totals,

standardized scores, word counts and percentages, thereby providing the user a variety of ways of understanding and processing the text they have processed and using this in further analysis.

More specifically the variables that DICTION calculates for each review that are of interest to this study are the five dimensions of Hart's (1984a; 1984b; 2000; 2001) theory of word choice and verbal tone, namely:

- *Certainty*, which involves language and words that indicate resoluteness, inflexibility, completeness, and a tendency to speak with authority.
- *Optimism*, or language that endorses an individual, a group, a concept, or an event.
- *Activity*, which has to do with language that is about movement, change, and the implementation of ideas and the avoidance of inertia.
- *Realism*, or language that describes tangible, immediate, and recognizable issues.
- *Commonality*, which has to do with language that communicates communitarian concepts and highlights the agreed-upon values of a group of individuals and rejects language that is idiosyncratic in terms of engagement.

In simple terms, to do this, DICTION checks each word in a piece of text by referring to its master corpus, and if the word is to be found there, it scores it against the particular dimension referred to above. Words that do not appear in the corpus are simply ignored from the dimensions perspective. However, they do form part of the computation of the calculated variables described next.

DICTION also computes the four “calculated variables” of a piece of text (Hart, 2001; Short and Palmer, 2002), namely:

- *Insistence*, which has to do with the use of repeated words, and is a measure of the extent to which codes are restricted and semantic “contentedness” is achieved.
- *Variety*, which divides the number of different words in a passage by the total number of words.
- *Embellishment*, which is computed by dividing the number of adjectives in a piece of text by the number of verbs.
- *Complexity*, which is measured by dividing the average number of characters per word in a given input file by the total number of words.

Finally, DICTION also counts the total number of words in a piece of text, so that long texts can be compared with shorter texts for example, as well as the average number of characters per word, so that text that uses long, and perhaps more complex words, can be identified and highlighted (Short and Palmer, 2002)).

DICTION has been used as a research tool in a wide range of disciplines within the social sciences. In business and management research it has for example been used in accounting (e.g. Barkemeyer, Comyns, Figge, and Napolitano, 2014; Brennan and Kirwan, 2015); finance (e.g. Ferris, Hao and Liao, 2013; Kearney and Liu, 2014); entrepreneurship (e.g. Parhanhangas and Ehrlich, 2014; Williams, Novicevic and Ammeter, 2015); business ethics (e.g. Yuthas, Rogers and Dillard, 2002); and, strategic management (e.g. Finkelstein, 1997; Short and Palmer, 2008). In marketing specifically, it has, amongst others, been used by Aaker (1997) in her work on brand personality; Yadav, Prabhu and Chandy (2007) to study the contents of CEO letters to shareholders; and Zachary, McKenny, Short, Davis and Wu (2011) to explore the nature of franchise branding from an organizational identity perspective.

#### **4.4.4.2. Data transfer and cleaning**

Following the data processing by DICTION, the data was transferred to a spreadsheet file, from which it could be checked for correctness and cleaned to eliminate unnecessary or superfluous columns. The spreadsheet could then be used by statistical software, in this case SPSS.

#### **4.4.5. Step 5 - Statistical analysis of DICTION data in order to test hypotheses**

IBM SPSS version 22, a statistical predictive analytics software package was used to calculate and produce descriptive statistics for the data, and also to conduct a series of independent samples t tests to test the hypotheses and shed light on the study's main research question.

##### **4.4.5.1. Descriptive Statistics**

The purpose of descriptive statistics is to portray the composition of the sample as well as to summarize the data (Pallant, 2013). This involves a classification of univariate analyses, which seek to provide information about one variable at a

time (Adler and Clark, 2015). Descriptive statistics were thus calculated for the five dimensions, and the four calculated variables for the highest ranked firms with both five and one star ratings, and also for the lowest ranked firms, with both five and one star ratings. Frequencies and ranges were reported for word counts of reviews, while means and standard deviations were reported for word counts, the five dimensions and the four calculated variables.

#### **4.4.5.2. Inferential Statistics**

Inferential statistics have been used in order to make statistical generalizations about the populations of interest. This research used a series of independent samples t tests in order to test the hypotheses (Malhotra, 2010). An independent samples t test compares the means of two independent groups in order to determine whether there is statistical evidence that the associated population means are significantly different. The independent samples t test is a parametric test and was used to test all four hypotheses of this study.

#### **4.5 CONCLUSION**

The current study has adopted an exploratory research design in order to investigate the nature of employee brand engagement in social media in B2B firms. In particular, it uses data in the form of job reviews gathered and scraped from a large social media website to investigate the differences between employee brand engagement in top ranked versus bottom ranked B2B firms.

This research made use of the content analysis software DICTION to determine the extent to which Hart's notions of word choice and verbal tone are apparent in job reviews. Data scraped from the social media website Glassdoor was subjected to analysis by DICTION, following which this was analyzed using the statistical package, SPSS, to compute descriptive statistics, and also to test the hypotheses using independent samples t tests.

In the following chapter, the results of these procedures are discussed.

## **CHAPTER V: RESULTS**

### **5.1. INTRODUCTION**

The previous chapter outlined the methodological approach followed in the current research. The research has used an exploratory approach to explore the nature of brand engagement in social media by employees as stakeholders in a B2B environment. Against the backdrop of a theory of word choice and emotional tone, as expressed in employee reviews of their employer brands, comparisons are made between top- and bottom ranked B2B brands, and also between highly rated brands and brands rated low. The focus is on how employees express Hart's dimensions of word choice and verbal tone, and how the calculated variables of Hart's theory manifest in these reviews. The annual survey of B2B brands by Brandwatch (2015) served as the source of the rankings of B2B firms, and the social medium Glassdoor served as the source of the review text as well as the employee ratings. The previous chapter provided a justification for the use of both the rankings and ratings data, a theoretical framework for making conceptual sense of text, and the use of the DICTION software for content analysis.

This chapter begins with a brief summary of the research question and hypotheses that were examined. The descriptive statistics for the four sub-samples are presented. Thereafter, a series of independent t tests is conducted that permits the hypotheses to be tested. Finally, concluding remarks are made.

### **5.2. SUMMARY OF RESEARCH QUESTION AND HYPOTHESES**

The current research considers work in four broad areas, namely brand engagement (e.g. Antonucci, 2011; Hollebeek, 2011a; Hoeffler and Keller, 2002); stakeholder engagement with particular reference to employees as stakeholders (e.g. Kumar and Pansari, 2016; Wilden, Gudergan, and Lings, 2010; Vomberg, Homburg and Bornemann, 2014), social media (e.g. Lamberton and Stephen, 2016; Berthon et al., 2012; Kietzman et al., 2011), and the nature of word choice and verbal tone (Hart, 1984a; 1984b; 2000; 2001). Its intention is to examine how the employees of B2B firms engage with their firms' brands in social media, and to explore this engagement through the lens of a theory of word choice and verbal tone. The research conducted here was guided by the following research question:

*How does the brand engagement (via social media) of employees of highly ranked B2B employers differ from employees' social media brand engagement with low ranked B2B employers?*

The empirical study began by identifying the top 30 ranked B2B employers, as well as the bottom 30 ranked B2B employers in the Brandwatch (2015) rankings study. Subsequently, employee reviews were scraped from Glassdoor and became the content data for further analysis; by in order to answer the above research question, four hypotheses were formulated:

*H<sub>1</sub>: The word choice and verbal tone dimensions of the reviews of employees of highly ranked B2B firms will differ significantly from those of lowly ranked B2B firms.*

*H<sub>2</sub>: The word choice and verbal tone dimensions of the reviews of employees of highly rated B2B firms will differ significantly from those of lowly rated B2B firms.*

*H<sub>3</sub>: The word choice and verbal tone calculated variables of the reviews of employees of highly ranked B2B firms will differ significantly from those of lowly ranked B2B firms.*

*H<sub>4</sub>: The word choice and verbal tone calculated variables of the reviews of employees of highly rated B2B firms will differ significantly from those of lowly rated B2B firms.*

These targets could not be met entirely, as not all of the firms (both high- and low ranked) had 100 five star ratings and/or one star ratings. Therefore, as many as possible reviews were identified in each case: For top ranked firms, 2,315 five star and 1,983 one star reviews; for bottom ranked firms, 1,013 five star and 1,025 one star reviews were identified. Thus, while the targets were not met, the study still ended up with very large samples of reviews in all four instances. Each review was copied from Glassdoor and pasted into a separate text document. Then all of these documents were simultaneously processed and analyzed by the DICTION software.

### **5.3. SUMMARY STATISTICS**

The summary statistics are shown in table 5.1. While the data is analyzed in a statistically robust fashion below, an observation to be made from Table 5.1 is that one star reviews appear to be much longer on average than five star reviews



for both top- and bottom rated companies. In order to test  $H_1$  and  $H_3$ , all the reviews (both one- and five star) of the top ranked firms first, and then for the bottom ranked firms, were combined. Similarly, in order to test  $H_2$  and  $H_4$  all the five star reviews first, and then all the one star reviews (for both top- and bottom ranked firms), were combined.

A preliminary observation to be made from Table 5.1 at this stage is that employees who only award their employers one star ratings, write longer job reviews than employees who award their employers five star ratings. This is true for both highly- and low ranked employer brands. The longest review was one of 1264 words by an employee of a top ranked company who had awarded their firm a one star rating. Very short reviews occurred across all the categories in Table 5.1, with the shortest being only 4 words by an employee of a bottom ranked company to whom they had awarded only one star. When one considers that the standard deviation is a measure that quantifies the amount of variation or dispersion of a set of data values, some other observations can be made from Table 5.1. Overall there seems to be far greater variation in all the dimensions of word choice and verbal tone for the five star reviews of highly ranked firms than for any of the other three categories. There is also far greater variance in the calculated variable of embellishment (the use of adjectives rather than verbs) exhibited by employees of top ranked companies who write five star reviews ( $sd=40.90$ ), especially when compared to employees of bottom ranked firms who write one star reviews ( $sd=13.13$ ).

In order to test  $H_1$  and  $H_3$ , all the reviews (both one- and five star) of the top ranked firms first, and then for the bottom ranked firms, were combined. Similarly, in order to test  $H_2$  and  $H_4$  all the five star reviews first, and then all the one star reviews (for both top- and bottom ranked firms), were combined. These procedures are discussed in the next section.

Table 5.1. Descriptive DICTION Statistics: Total Words, Calculated Variables and Dimensions

Statistic	Diction Dimensions Variables	and	Top Ranked Companies		Bottom Companies		Ranked
			5 Star Reviews (n= 2315)	1 Star Reviews (n=1983)	5 Star Reviews (n=1013)	1 Star Reviews (n=1025)	
Longest Review (words)			768	1264	571	886	
Shortest Review (words)			9	6	5	4	
Means	Total Words		44.60	107.99	49.89	109.16	
			Calculated Variables				
	Insistence		9.45	21.06	10.99	21.42	
	Embellishment		14.23	5.66	12.25	4.45	
	Variety		0.87	0.78	0.85	0.77	
	Complexity		5.20	4.93	5.06	4.86	
			Dimensions				
	Activity		22.44	39.72	26.61	42.64	
	Optimism		57.78	49.08	56.86	48.60	
	Certainty		39.67	42.80	41.18	43.06	
	Realism		44.88	46.33	45.96	46.98	
	Commonality		50.73	49.72	50.44	49.54	
Standard Deviations	Total Words		96.96	114.47	48.36	102.31	
			Calculated Variables				
	Insistence		30.32	31.06	20.74	30.85	
	Embellishment		40.90	15.77	24.39	13.13	
	Variety		0.98	0.13	0.11	0.12	
	Complexity		6.05	0.65	0.77	0.61	
			Dimensions				
	Activity		77.06	32.83	50.11	27.43	
	Optimism		68.28	8.34	9.82	7.35	
	Certainty		46.83	5.95	6.90	5.75	
	Realism		52.80	6.24	7.47	5.97	
	Commonality		58.62	5.49	6.42	4.69	

## 5.5. HYPOTHESIS TESTING

In order to test the hypotheses a series of independent samples t tests were run. An independent samples t test is a parametric test that compares the means of two independent groups in order to determine whether there is statistical evidence that the associated population means are significantly different.

### 5.5.1 Differences between highly- versus low ranked B2B firms with regard to word choice and verbal tone dimensions

H<sub>1</sub> states that the word choice and verbal tone dimensions of the reviews of employees of highly ranked B2B firms will differ significantly from those of lowly ranked B2B firms. The firm ranking analyses indicate employees' reviews on Glassdoor differ significantly for all the content dimensions with the exception of commonality, as shown in Table 5.2 below. Employees in top ranked firms were significantly more optimistic ( $p < 0.001$ ;  $d = 0.105$ ) about their employers than those in bottom ranked firms. In contrast, employees of top ranked firms expressed significantly lower levels of activity, certainty, and realism (all at  $p < 0.001$ ) than employees in firms ranked in the bottom 30. There were no significant differences with regard to the dimension of commonality ( $p = 0.090$ ). In simple terms, while employees in top ranked firms are more optimistic, they talk less about movement, change and the implementation of ideas. Furthermore, they are less resolute and more flexible, and also talk less about tangible and immediate issues.

H<sub>1</sub> is thus accepted, with the exception of the dimension of commonality.

Table 5.2 Content Dimensions Variable by Firm Ranking

Dimension Variable*	Top Ranked Firms			Bottom Ranked Firms			Independent Samples t-Test**			
	n	Mean	S.Dev.	n	Mean	S.Dev.	t	df	p (2-tailed)	Cohen's d
Activity	4298	-0.030	1.037	2038	0.064	0.914	-3.685	4492	< 0.001	0.096
Optimism		0.033	1.026		-0.070	0.939	3.991	4339	< 0.001	0.105
Certainty		-0.049	1.016		0.103	0.958	-5.754	4220	< 0.001	0.154
Realism		-0.042	1.018		0.088	0.954	-4.955	4245	< 0.001	0.132
Commonality		0.014	1.058		-0.029	0.864	1.696	4810	0.090	N/S

\*All variables have been standardized

\*\*Equal variances not assumed as Levene's Test is significant in all cases at the  $p < 0.01$  level

### 5.5.2. Differences between highly- versus low rated B2B firms with regard to word choice and verbal tone dimensions

H<sub>2</sub> states that the word choice and verbal tone dimensions of the reviews of employees of highly ranked B2B firms will differ significantly from those of lowly ranked B2B firms. Five star reviews are compared to one star reviews with regard to the five content dimensions in Table 5.3. All five content analysis dimensions differ significantly ( $p < 0.001$ ) depending on the ratings accorded the firms. Reviews that rated B2B brands with five stars—the highest rating—were unsurprisingly far more optimistic ( $d = 0.930$ ) and exhibited more commonality ( $d$

= 0.152) than one star reviews. Yet, like the firm ranking analyses, activity, certainty, and realism were significantly lower in five star reviews than in one star reviews. Five star ratings talk significantly more about the connection between the individual and the community.

H<sub>2</sub> is thus accepted.

Table 5.3 Content Dimensions Variable by Firm Rating

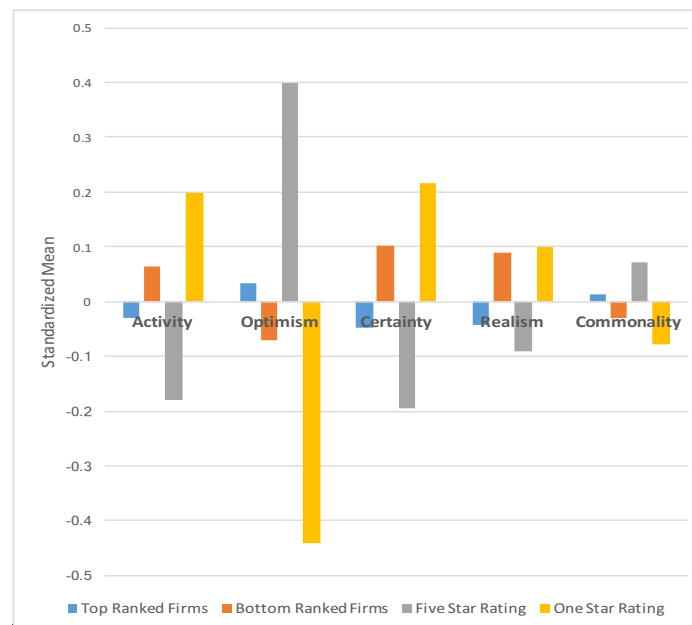
Dimension Variable*	5 Star Rating			1 Star Rating			Independent Samples t-Test**			
	n	Mean	S.Dev.	n	Mean	S.Dev.	t	df	p (2-tailed)	Cohen's d
Activity	3328	-0.179	1.185	3008	0.198	0.692	-15.680	5451	< 0.001	0.389
Optimism		0.398	1.007		-0.441	0.784	37.198	6199	< 0.001	0.930
Certainty		-0.195	1.062		0.216	0.878	-16.844	6285	< 0.001	0.422
Realism		-0.090	1.099		0.099	0.867	-7.650	6221	< 0.001	0.242
Commonality		0.071	1.145		-0.079	0.802	6.123	5973	< 0.001	0.152

\*All variables have been standardized

\*\*Equal variances not assumed as Levene's Test is significant in all cases at the p < 0.001 level

By visually comparing, in figure 5.1, the various standardized means in the two analyses (i.e., firm ranking and review rating), it is possible to observe similar patterns across analysis groups comparing the positive (i.e., top ranked firms and top rated reviews) and negative (i.e., bottom ranked firms and bottom rated reviews) groups with regard to the dimensions of word choice and verbal tone.

Figure 5.1: Content Dimensions Mean Differences



As the above figure shows, the relative difference between top and bottom rated reviews is much larger than top and bottom ranked firms. This shows that the

brand ranking or position is less important than the individual rating in terms of the content of the review.

### 5.5.3. Differences between highly- versus low ranked B2B firms with regard to calculated variables

When analyzing the reviews by firm ranking, all calculated content variables' means are significantly different as shown in Table 5.4. Top ranked firms' reviews are less insistent than bottom ranked firms' reviews ( $p = 0.047$ ;  $d = 0.053$ ). Furthermore, top ranked firms' reviews contained more embellishment ( $p = 0.001$ ;  $d = 0.091$ ), variety ( $p < 0.001$ ;  $d = 0.170$ ), and were more complex ( $p < 0.001$ ;  $d = 0.156$ ) than bottom ranked firms' reviews. To summarize these findings more simply, the review for a top ranked firm would rely less on repeated words and phrases, would use a greater ratio of adjectives to verbs, uses a greater variety of words, and is more complex.

$H_3$  is therefore accepted.

Table 5.4: Calculated Content Variables by Firm Ranking

Calculated Variable	Top Ranked Firms			Bottom Ranked Firms			Levene's Test Sig.	Independent Samples t-Test**			
	n	Mean	S.Dev.	n	Mean	S.Dev.		t	df	p (2-tailed)	Cohen's d
Insistence	4298	-0.017	0.998	2038	0.036	1.002	0.121	-1.987	6334	0.047	0.053
Embellishment		0.029	1.038		-0.060	0.911	< 0.001	3.467	4508	0.001	0.091
Variety		0.055	0.995		-0.115	1.001	0.707	6.340	6334	< 0.001	0.170
Complexity		0.049	1.029		-0.104	0.929	< 0.001	5.899	4391	< 0.001	0.156

\*All variables have been standardized

\*\*Equal variances not assumed when Levene's Test is significant

### 5.5.4. Differences between highly- versus low ranked B2B firms with regard to calculated variables

As in the firm ranking analysis above, all the calculated variables' means were significantly different between five star and one star rated reviews, as can be seen in Table 5.5. Five star reviews exhibited significantly lower insistence than one star reviews ( $p < 0.001$ ;  $d = 0.427$ ); more embellishment ( $p < 0.001$ ;  $d = 0.395$ ); greater variety ( $p < 0.001$ ;  $d = 0.724$ ), and were more complex ( $p < 0.001$ ;  $d = 0.344$ ). In simpler terms then, employees writing five star reviews rely less on repeated words and phrases, use a greater ratio of adjectives to verbs, use a greater variety of words, and their reviews are more complex.

$H_4$  is therefore accepted.

Table 5.5: Calculated Content Variables by Firm Rating

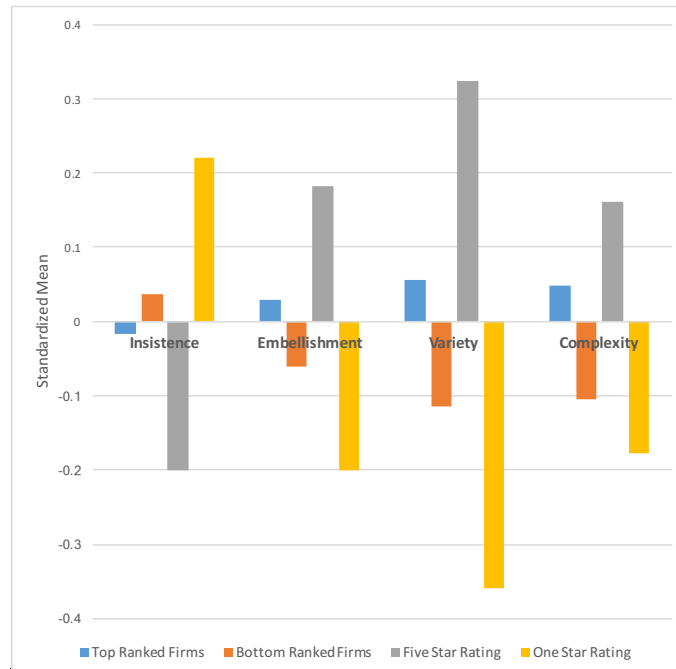
Calculated Variable	5 Star Rating			1 Star Rating			Independent Samples t-Test**			
	n	Mean	S.Dev.	n	Mean	S.Dev.	t	df	p (2-tailed)	Cohen's d
Insistence	3328	-0.200	0.779	3008	0.221	1.158	-16.789	5186	< 0.001	0.427
Embellishment		0.182	1.189		-0.201	0.682	15.899	5401	< 0.001	0.395
Variety		0.324	0.871		-0.359	1.011	28.658	5968	< 0.001	0.724
Complexity		0.160	1.097		-0.177	0.846	13.778	6183	< 0.001	0.344

\*All variables have been standardized

\*\*Equal variances not assumed as Levene's Test is significant in all cases at the  $p < 0.001$  level

By visually comparing, in figure 5.2, the various standardized means in the two analyses (i.e., firm ranking and review rating), it is possible to observe similar patterns across analysis groups comparing the positive (i.e., top ranked firms and top rated reviews) and negative (i.e., bottom ranked firms and bottom rated reviews) groups with regard to the calculated variables of word choice and verbal tone. However, the relative difference between top and bottom rated reviews is much larger than top and bottom ranked firms. This indicates that the brand ranking or position might be less important than the individual rating in terms of the content of the review.

Figure 5.2: Calculated Variables Mean Differences



## 5.6. CONCLUSION

This chapter outlined all results obtained from both the descriptive and inferential tests conducted. The descriptive statistics indicated that while there are a number of issues that needed to be explored by means of statistical tests of significance, the reviews of low ranked employer brands, and also those of low rated employer brands tended to be more verbose. On average, these reviews tended to be longer.

Regarding the hypotheses that tested whether there were statistically significant differences between high- and low ranked firms, and high- and low rated firms with regard to the dimensions of word choice and verbal tone, and also with regard to the calculated variables thereof, partial support was found for  $H_1$ , and  $H_2$ ,  $H_3$  and  $H_4$  were supported. In the case of  $H_1$  the firm ranking analyses indicate employees' reviews on Glassdoor differ significantly for all the content dimensions with the exception of commonality. Employees in top ranked firms were significantly more optimistic, and expressed significantly lower levels of activity, certainty, and realism. There were no significant differences with regard to the dimension of commonality.

In the case of  $H_2$ , all five content analysis dimensions differed significantly according to the ratings of the firms. B2B brands with five stars had reviews that were more optimistic and exhibited more commonality. However, activity, certainty, and realism were significantly lower in five star reviews than in one star reviews. A comparison of the various standardized means in the two analyses conducted to test  $H_1$  and  $H_2$  showed that the relative difference between top and bottom rated reviews is much larger than top and bottom ranked firms.

$H_3$  considered the reviews by firm ranking with regard to calculated content variables. All the differences here were statistically significant. Top ranked firms' reviews are less insistent than bottom ranked firms' reviews, and also exhibited greater embellishment, more variety, and were more complex than bottom ranked firms' reviews.

In the case of  $H_4$  all the calculated variables' means were significantly different between five star and one star rated reviews. Five star reviews exhibited significantly lower insistence than one star reviews, and significantly greater embellishment, variety and complexity. Furthermore, similar patterns were observed across analysis groups comparing the positive (i.e., top ranked firms and top rated reviews) and negative (i.e., bottom ranked firms and bottom rated reviews) groups with regard to the calculated variables of word choice and verbal

tone. The relative difference between top and bottom rated reviews is much larger than top and bottom ranked firms, which indicates that the brand ranking seems to be less important than the individual rating in terms of the content of the review.

The following chapter provides a detailed discussion of each hypothesis test, and discusses the theoretical and managerial implications thereof. It also acknowledges the limitations of the research, and identifies avenues for future research in this domain.



## CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 6.1. INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter provided the results for all descriptive and inferential statistics conducted in the current research. The descriptive statistics consisted of the sample composition and the descriptive statistics for each of the five dimensions of word choice and verbal tone, as well as the calculated variables. The inferential statistics relates to each of the parametric hypothesis tests conducted. Independent samples t tests were used to test the hypotheses.

In this chapter these findings are discussed individually and the theoretical and managerial implications thereof are explored in more detail. The limitations of the current research are then acknowledged, and avenues for future research are identified.

### 6.2. SUMMARY OF HYPOTHESES AND FINDINGS

This section provides a brief summary of the hypotheses that were tested in the current research and the results of these tests. These results are summarized in Table 6.1 below.

Table 6.1: Summary Table of All Hypotheses Tests

No.	Brief Description	Test Used	Test Statistic	P- value	Outcome
H <sub>1</sub>	Dimensions will differ significantly between high- and low ranked B2B firms	Independent Samples t Test	Between 5.75 and 1.69	- Between <0.0001 and 0.090	Partially accept
H <sub>2</sub>	Dimensions will differ significantly between high- and low rated B2B firms	Independent Samples t Test	Between 16.84 and 37.19	- <0.001	Accept
H <sub>3</sub>	Calculated variables will differ significantly between high- and low ranked B2B firms	Independent Samples t Test	Between 1.98 and 6.34	- Between <0.001 and 0.047	Accept
H <sub>4</sub>	Calculated variables will differ significantly between high- and low rated B2B firms	Independent Samples t Test	Between 16.78 and 28.65	- <0.001	Accept

Significant differences were found in the reviews between high- and low ranked B2B firms with regard to the dimensions of word choice and verbal tone with the exception of the dimension of commonality, which resulted in the partial acceptance of  $H_1$ . In the case of the ratings of B2B firms by their employees, significant differences were found for all the dimensions of word choice and verbal tone. With regard to the calculated variables of word choice and verbal tone, these differed significantly in the cases of both B2B firm rankings and ratings. In the rankings instance, the insistence variable came close to the  $p < 0.05$  cutoff, with  $p < 0.047$ , but  $H_3$  could still be accepted overall. It is worth reiterating the observation made in Table 5.1 in the previous chapter that unfavorable reviews, for both top ranked (mean for 5 star = 44.6 words; mean for 1 star = 107.99 words) and bottom ranked B2B firms (mean for 5 star = 49.89 words; mean for 1 star = 109.16 words), tend to be much longer than favorable reviews. Stated differently, this would indicate that when an employee rates an employing firm poorly, they have much more to say in their reviews than do employees who rate an employer highly. Furthermore, this is independent of the firm's ranking.

The following section discusses each hypothesis individually, drawing both theoretical and managerial implications from each.

### **6.3 KEY FINDINGS REGARDING THE HYPOTHESES**

This section discusses the findings for each of the hypotheses tested, and draws both theoretical and managerial insights from each. A set of general managerial implications is also presented at the end of the section.

#### **6.3.1. Hypothesis One**

The firm ranking analyses indicate employees' reviews on Glassdoor differ significantly between high- and low ranked firms for all the content dimensions with the exception of commonality. Employees in top ranked firms were significantly more optimistic ( $p < 0.001$ ;  $d = 0.105$ ) in what they said about their employers than those in bottom ranked firms. In contrast, employees of top ranked firms expressed significantly lower levels of activity, certainty, and realism (all at  $p < 0.001$ ) than employees in firms ranked in the bottom 30. There were no significant differences with regard to the dimension of commonality ( $p = 0.090$ ). In simple terms, while employees in top ranked firms are more optimistic, they talk less about movement, change and the implementation of ideas. Furthermore,

they are less resolute and more flexible, and also talk less about tangible and immediate issues.

*Optimism* has to do with language that is positive about a particular individual (such as a boss or a supervisor), a group (such as the team that an employee works in), a concept (such as a new idea, or a new product or a new strategic initiative the employee might be working on), or an event (such as an exciting new product launch) (Hart, (1984a; 1984b; 2000; 2001)). Thus it would seem that employees of highly ranked B2B firms talk significantly more optimistically about these brands than do those of low ranked brands. DICTION measures *optimism* a composite of praise, satisfaction and inspiration as expressed in the text, and then subtracts from that score and text content that implies blame, hardship and denial.

While the employees of lower ranked firms expressed significantly higher levels of activity, certainty, and realism than did those of higher ranked firms, the two groups were not different with regard to commonality. Language that communicates communitarian concepts is termed *Commonality*. Text that uses language that highlights the agreed-upon values of a group of individuals is generally regarded as communal, or expressing commonality. DICTION calculates commonality by summing the sub-components of centrality (the quality of being in the middle of somewhere or something, not taking sides), cooperation and rapport (a close and harmonious relationship in which the people or groups concerned understand each other's feelings or ideas and communicate well). Then it subtracts the sum of the subcomponents of diversity (the emphasizing and valuing of differences), exclusion and liberation from this to arrive at a final score for commonality.

### **6.3.2. Hypothesis Two**

When five star reviews were compared to one star reviews with regard to the five content dimensions, it was found that all five content analysis dimensions differed significantly depending on the ratings accorded the firms. Reviews that rated B2B brands with five stars—the highest rating—were unsurprisingly far more optimistic, and in this instance exhibited more commonality, than one star reviews. However, like the firm ranking analyses, activity, certainty, and realism were significantly lower in five star reviews than in one star reviews. Therefore in this instance, it can be said that employees who rate their firms highly, regardless of rank, are not only more optimistic, they also express significantly greater

commonality. Stated differently, they tend to talk more about how, in their firms, the agreed-upon values of a group of individuals are important and nurtured.

The reviews of the employees of low rated firms express significantly greater activity, certainty, and realism. Activity (cf. Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum, 1957) has to do with language that is about movement, change, and the implementation of ideas and the avoidance of inertia. DICTION measures the degree of activity in a text by summing the subcomponents of aggression (hostile or violent behavior or attitudes towards others), accomplishment (achieving this un- or successfully), communication (the way information is exchanged) and motion. Then it subtracts the following subcomponents from this to obtain a final score for activity: cognitive terms, passivity (acceptance of what happens, without active response or resistance), and the calculated variable of embellishment. It would therefore seem that the reviews that rate employing firms low contain language that is more aggressive, talks more about accomplishment or lack thereof, about communication or the absence thereof, and about motion. It also uses few cognitive terms, and is more accepting of what happens and embellishes less.

The reviews of the employees of low rated firms express significantly greater certainty, which means that they tend to use far more words that indicate resoluteness, inflexibility, completeness, and a tendency to speak with authority. DICTION calculates certainty by summing the scores on the subcomponents of tenacity (being determined and persistent), leveling (making sure of position or rank), collectives (using collective pronouns such as we, us and so forth), and the calculated variable of insistence (repeating words). Then it subtracts from that score the sum of the subcomponents of the numerical terms used in a piece of text, the ambivalence (having mixed feelings or contradictory ideas), self-reference, and the calculated variable of variety, or using a lot of different words. It would therefore seem that the reviews that rate employing firms low contain language that doesn't mix words, emphasizes where people in the organization fit, expresses as part of a group, and tends to use the same words repeatedly. The language also uses fewer numerical terms, and is more decisive. It tends to refer less to the speaker or creator of the text, and is in a way less personal, and uses fewer different words to express itself.

The reviews of the employees of low rated firms express significantly greater realism. Their language describes more tangible, immediate, and recognizable issues. DICTION calculates realism by summing the subcomponents of familiarity (close acquaintance with or knowledge of something), spatial

awareness (the ability to perceive distance or relationships), temporal awareness (relating to worldly rather than spiritual issues), a concern with the present, human interest, and concreteness. It then subtracts from this words that express the subcomponent of past concern, and also the calculated variable complexity. It would therefore seem that the reviews that rate employing firms low contain language that is about familiar things, knows where it stands, is more worldly than spiritual or philosophical, is concerned with human interest, the present, and is concrete rather than ephemeral. Furthermore, this language is unconcerned with the past, and is simple, or easy for a reader or audience to understand.

A visual comparison of the various standardized means in the two analyses (i.e., firm ranking and review rating) for the word choice and verbal tone dimensions in figure 5.1 shows that while the patterns across analysis groups comparing the positive (i.e., top ranked firms and top rated reviews) and negative (i.e., bottom ranked firms and bottom rated reviews) groups with regard to the dimensions of word choice and verbal tone. However, the relative difference between top and bottom rated reviews is much larger than top and bottom ranked firms. This shows that the brand ranking or position might be less important than the individual rating in terms of the content of the review. Stated differently, when employees rate firms, the differences exhibited in the word choice and verbal tone dimensions that they use are far more pronounced than is the case when the firms are ranked by an independent source. From a managerial perspective, this indicates that managers should give as much attention to employee ratings as they give to those of external parties.

### **6.3.3. Hypothesis Three**

All the word choice and verbal tone calculated variables' means were significant between top- and bottom ranked firms. Top ranked firms' reviews are less insistent than bottom ranked firms' reviews, but contained more embellishment, greater variety, and were more complex than bottom ranked firms' reviews. To summarize these findings more simply, the review for a top ranked firm would rely less on repeated words and phrases, would use a greater ratio of adjectives to verbs, would use a greater variety of words, and would be more complex.

Each of the four calculated variables can be explored again to gain deeper insight into what this means. Insistence has to do with the use of repeated words. Where key terms are repeated, this indicates that the author has a preference for a limited, ordered world. Simply, the author tends to use repeated words and

phrases to get a point across, and this seems to be significantly more the case in the reviews of employees of lower ranked B2B firms.

Employees of higher ranked B2B firms exhibit significantly more embellishment, variety, and complexity than do those of lower ranked firms. David Boder (1940) was interested in being able to interpret language from a psychological perspective. He believed that studying the numerical relationship between adjectives and verbs might shed light on this. His research compared the different writings of the same individual, between different individuals, and also between different types of writing. He found that it could sometimes vary for the same individual (depending on what they were writing), frequently differed between individuals, and varied greatly between different types of writing (for example drama versus science). Boder was of the opinion that heavy modification (using lots more adjectives than verbs) could slow down the verbal passage for the reader by de-emphasizing human and material action. One speculation that can be made in the case of the data in the current study is that employees who write reviews for highly ranked firms write for themselves (“congratulating” themselves on working for such a prestigious employer), whereas employees of lower ranked firms write for others as well, and desire to communicate a more direct message as to what its actually like to work for such a firm.

The calculated variable of variety is based on Johnson’s (1946) type-token ratio, which in DICTION is calculated by dividing the number of different words in a passage by the total number of words. Thus, a high score on variety would indicate that the speaker or a writer is avoiding overstatement and has a preference for precision. A simple example of variety would be Neil Armstrong’s famous sentence when landing on the moon, “One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.” This scores a type-token ratio of 0.80 – eight non-repetitive words out of ten total. The sentence could have been reduced in variety by stating it thus: “One small step for man, one giant step for man,” in which case its type-token ratio would only be 0.20. It is interesting to note that low variety scores have been associated with lying. Colwell, Hiscock and Menon (2002) argue that people who lie tend to become more stereotypical in their responses, which leads to less lexical diversity as measured by the type-token ratio. It would obviously be stretching this too far here to contend that employees of low ranked firms are less than truthful. It is more likely that they are more fixated on repetition and simplicity in their reviews to get their points across, and perhaps don't give it as much thought as the employees of top ranked firms who are more effusive in their praise.

Employees of highly ranked B2B firms also write job reviews that are more complex. The notion of complexity is strongly related to Flesch's (1951) notion of readability, a concept that has received considerable attention in the marketing literature (Sawyer, Laran and Xu, 2008; Leong, Ewing and Pitt, 2002; Mills, Pitt and Sattari, 2011). Flesch argues that convoluted phrasings, long sentences and long words make a text's ideas abstract and its implications unclear for the reader or for the audience. This suggests in simple terms that employees of highly ranked B2B firms are writing job reviews that are more difficult to read. Again, it is speculation to surmise why this might be so. A possible explanation is these employees are more engaged while writing the reviews and are focused on a number of different aspects of their job that they want to get down "on paper" without too much regard to their writing style. Employees of lower ranked B2B firms have fewer things on their mind, perhaps, and want to tell a simpler story.

#### **6.3.4. Hypothesis Four**

The calculated variables' means were all significantly different between five star and one star rated reviews, and followed a similar pattern. Five star reviews exhibited significantly lower insistence than one star reviews, and again showed more embellishment, greater variety, and greater complexity. The detailed discussion of the calculated variables under H3 above therefore holds here as well. Simply, employees writing five star reviews rely less on repeated words and phrases, use a greater ratio of adjectives to verbs, use a greater variety of words, and write more complex reviews.

Similarly, the visual comparison enabled by figure 5.2 in the previous chapter shows similar patterns to that in figure 5.1, across analysis groups comparing the positive (i.e., top ranked firms and top rated reviews) and negative (i.e., bottom ranked firms and bottom rated reviews) groups with regard to the calculated variables of word choice and verbal tone. Here however, the relative difference between top and bottom rated reviews is much larger than top and bottom ranked firms. This not only indicates that the brand ranking or position might be less important than the individual rating in terms of the content of the review, but that the differences in terms of reviews for ratings are even more pronounced. This reiterates the need for managers who are concerned with brand engagement in B2B firms to pay a lot of attention to employee ratings of brands when studying their reviews.

#### 6.4 MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

A number of more general managerial implications flow from the findings of this research. The choice of the top- and bottom ranked B2B employers for this study was industry overarching. Since different industries display different characteristics, employees likely evaluate them differently. For example, highly skilled and loyal employees in the IT industry are likely to differ from those in the B2B settings with higher labor churn and seasonal labor fluctuations. As Lamberton and Stephen (2016) suggested, social media provide a rich source of managerial insight, apart from being a source of data for academic investigations. Therefore, B2B brand managers would be advised to conduct their own analyses of Glassdoor content, first for their own B2B employer brands, then to those of their competitors, and perhaps even broader, to encompass suppliers and B2B customers.

Kumar and Pansari (2016) note the more positive the attitude and behavior and the higher the level of connectedness that a stakeholder has with both a brand and a firm, the higher the level of the stakeholder's engagement will be. This is important for managers, because it has been observed in this study that in the case of both highly ranked- and highly rated firms, the dimensions of *optimism* and *communality* are significantly higher than they are in low ranked and low rated firms. Simply, employees of highly ranked and highly rated firms are more optimistic about their firms, the brand they engage with, and in all likelihood their futures in these environments. Similarly, they see themselves as part of a community, as part of a team with others, and these communities are built around a brand as a common identifier. The benefits to the firm of these phenomena are profound: There is considerable evidence of the positive effects of these behaviors on a range of business outcomes such as increased revenues, lowered costs, better service and enhanced customer satisfaction.

If optimism and communality are regarded as the key drivers of brand engagement, as well as important distinguishers of the ratings and rankings of firms, it is useful to consider a 2X2 matrix that juxtaposes these two dimensions of word choice and verbal tone. This is illustrated in figure 6.1 below. The matrix can be used as a diagnostic tool by both human resource- and marketing managers to best identify where to focus their corporate social media engagement efforts.



Figure 6.1: Key drivers of employee brand engagement on social media

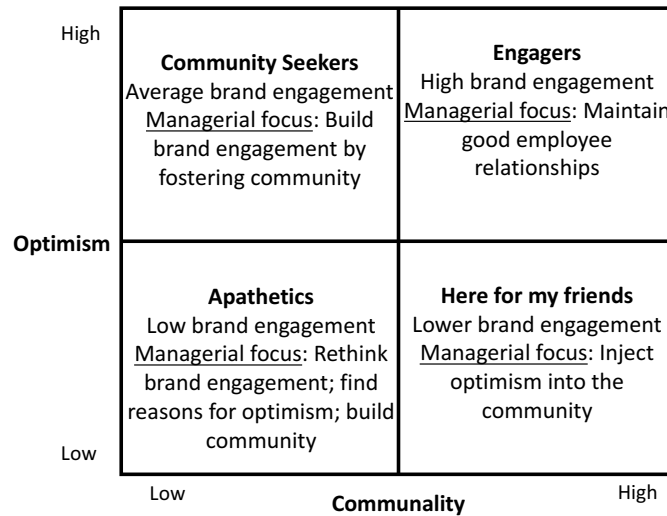


Figure 6.1 posits that there will be four different kinds of employee brand engagement on social media situations in B2B firms, and that human resources and marketing managers should focus on different strategies in each case. The ideal situation is that of the *engagers*, typically found in both highly ranked and highly rated B2B firms. Here, employees sense both a high attachment to their communities, and are also optimistic about the firm. The manager's task here is to uphold both the optimism and the communality in order to maintain the highest levels of brand engagement. Inevitably this will be achieved by a continual attention to good employee relationships with the brand, the firm and each other.

In the case of the *community seekers* quadrant, while there is high optimism among employees about the firm and its brand, communality is lacking. The manager's task here will focus on building a sense of community among employees. Social media can be a powerful way of doing this, and astute managers will find creative ways of fostering communality through this vehicle.

In the "*here for my friends*" quadrant, it is very possible that the engagement that employees have is not so much with the brand, but with each other. There is high communality, but this might actually cause employees to coalesce in negative ways, rather than in ways that are beneficial to the brand. Indeed, their negative feelings toward the firm might be their reason to band together, and this could have deleterious consequences for the firm and its brand. The manager's challenge in this instance is to find ways to inject optimism into the situation and

to use the communality that exists for good instead, and in this way to turn brand engagement positive.

Finally, the most pessimistic scenario in terms of brand engagement is found in the *apathetics* quadrant, where both optimism and communality are low. There are two negative consequences here: One is that employees who are pessimistic and find no community in their firms will leave, which is undesirable if they are good and competent. The other is that they will continue to engage with the brand in a negative way, and this in turn will have an adverse impact on other stakeholders, such as fellow employees and customers.

Most B2B firms are, by definition, not at the extremes of brand rankings. They fall somewhere in between the highest- and lowest ranked brands on the spectrum, not only in terms of brand rankings surveys, but also in terms of brand engagement. The use of Glassdoor data allows managers to compare the nature of their brand engagement to others' (e.g., their closest competitors' or a firm against which they want to benchmark) and to develop strategies that will enable them to shift their level of brand engagement over time.

A final and fundamental implication for managers, as already stated in the introduction, is that brand engagement in a B2B environment is not only about customers, but also about other stakeholders, especially employees. This is borne out by the results of this study, which show that there are differences in employee brand engagement between top and bottom ranked B2B firms, and even more so, between employees who rate firms high and those who rate them low. As various authors have asserted (Dabirian et al. 2016; Vomberg et al., 2015; Wilden et al., 2010), brands and human capital are more important and interlinked than most managers acknowledge. The management of these two assets therefore requires more than occasional attention, rather, they should become part of a regular organizational brand strategy.

## **6.5. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

This study has a number of limitations. First, the data was collected from Glassdoor only. With 30 million subscribers from 190 countries and 10 million company reviews of more than 500 thousand firms, Glassdoor is undeniably the most popular social medium for employer reviews. However, there are certainly other social media platforms where employee's share and access data related to B2B brand employers, including RateMyEmployer or Kununu. Future research

might wish to consider reviews from these social media as well, and where necessary comparisons could be made.

Second, there are other, more general social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, which this study did not include, where employees engage with their employer brands. These social media might provide a different perspective on social media brand engagement by B2B employees, first, because comments might be shorter (as on Facebook), or limited (as on Twitter); second, because these comments are generally not anonymous (the name of the individual would be on both Facebook and LinkedIn), as they are on Glassdoor, and other individuals who are also named can respond; third, on the more general social media platforms, users can engage with brands by uploading more than just words and ratings – they can post pictures and videos for example.

Third, Brandwatch is only one source of B2B brand rankings, and it should be borne in mind that these rankings are conducted for commercial purposes, rather than for the purposes of academic research. It is possible that this study might have obtained different results had it used another source of B2B brand rankings.

Fourth, while Hart's theory of word choice and verbal tone, and the DICTION software, which is based on it, offers a solid conceptual framework and means for analyzing text, in the way it was used here, it constrains the researcher to analyzing those dimensions and variables only.

Finally, like most research that relies on voluntary contributions by respondents, there is almost certainly a response bias present in this data that is difficult to account for. Because people who write reviews tend to fall into extremes, love or hate, and this research only looked at extremes (one and five star reviews), the study has not accounted for the whole spectrum of reviews that are present on Glassdoor. There is a possibility that three star reviews, for example, would again be different from one- and five star reviews.

## **6.6. AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Several avenues for future research arise from this work. First, this work is at a cross roads between qualitative and quantitative research. On the one hand, the data is qualitative. The research method was unobtrusive, did not involve directly interviewing respondents using pre-designed questionnaires and allowed respondents to answer in their own words. On the other hand, this study has quantified qualitative data by applying a theoretical framework implemented

through software that assigns numbers to words. Thus, while the research tells us what people are saying, it does not tell us more about why they are saying it. There would be much to learn from depth interviews or focus groups that dug deeper into the motivations for B2B employees' engagement with these brands.

Second, while the study has used DICTION's predefined master-corpus in order to operationalize Hart's theory of word choice and verbal tone, DICTION has the facility for the user to employ their own dictionaries instead. For example, Aaker's (1997) brand personality dimensions were converted into dictionaries in order to study the brand personalities of nations as expressed on their tourism websites (Pitt et al., 2007). The same dictionaries could in fact be applied to the text used here to examine employee brand engagement in a B2B environment, whilst still using the DICTION method to see whether this would provide additional or different insights.

Other content analysis software, such as Leximancer or IBM's Watson could also be applied to analyze employee reviews of B2B brands. Leximancer provides detailed graphic maps of texts, which highlight the main concepts that appear in a piece of text. For example, Robson and her colleagues (Robson, Farshid, Bredican and Humphrey, 2013) used Leximancer to analyze the text contained in a very large number of smartphone game apps in order to compare the differences between one- and five star reviews. IBM's Watson suite of programs, uses Natural Language Processing (NLP) to understand, interpret and respond to the way in which humans normally speak just as another human would, rather than take programmed or coded instructions, the way most computer programs do. IBM's real purposes behind the Watson project include the rapid accessing and interpretation of medical records and data, which should rapidly improve the diagnosis of serious health conditions such as lung cancer. Among the many other applications that the Watson project has embarked upon is the Personality Insights service (Lee, Mahmud, Chen, Zhou, and Nichols, 2014; Mahmud, Zhou, Megiddo, Nichols, and Drews, 2013; 2014) that enables the user to derive insights from text and other digital communications. It uses linguistic analytics to infer individuals' intrinsic personality characteristics from their own words in textual format.

Finally, the nature of the numerical output from DICTION lends itself well to analysis that permits positioning of objects and characteristics in multidimensional space. For example, the top ranked and bottom ranked firms could be used as columns and the content dimensions or calculated variables could be used as rows as input to a correspondence analysis procedure

(Bendixen 1995; Greenacre 2007; Hoffman and Franke 1986) that would permit these to be displayed graphically so that further conclusion and inferences could be drawn.

## **6.7. CONCLUSION**

How stakeholders such as customers and employees engage with a brand is a complex issue. For researchers studying this phenomenon, the domain is made problematic by the need to define issues such as breadth (are we talking about a single brand, a category of brands, or a corporate brand?) and depth (do we want deep understanding into how an individual- or a small group of stakeholders engage-, or do we want a broader overview of how a large number of stakeholders engage with a brand?). The study presented here attempts to provide insights with regard to stakeholder brand engagement at the corporate level, and gives a broad overview of how a large number of stakeholders do this. Unlike most studies of brand engagement, the work presented here focuses on the engagement of stakeholders other than customers, and it does this in a B2B environment, rather than in business-to-consumer as is typically the case in most marketing studies. Moreover, it does so from the perspective of a strong theoretical framework, namely Hart's theory of word choice and verbal tone, to study how B2B employees engage with their employer brands in social media.

It finds that there are significant differences between how the employees of top ranked B2B brands and how those of bottom ranked B2B brands engage with these in social media, and these findings are also established between top- and bottom rated employers. A finding that is interesting to speculate on, and one that might be worth investigating in the future is that employees of top ranked brands, as well as those who rate their brands highly, write reviews that are less optimal from a stylistic, linguistic perspective, when the findings regarding the calculated variables are considered. Their reviews tend to break some of the rules for what linguistics scholars such as Flesch (1951) and Boder (1927) would consider a well-written piece of text: They write reviews that are less insistent (or less "to the point"), and embellish more, and their reviews also tend to be more complex, or simply, more difficult to read.

As Lamberton and Stephen (2016) have stated, social media facilitate, first, individual expression by allowing an organization's stakeholders to generate their own content and broadcast this to audiences that might range from just a few friends or family members, to the thousands of employees and potential employees of a large organization. Much of this content will be about the branded

offerings they either love or hate or are indifferent to. Second, social media have become a major source of market intelligence for marketing practitioners as well as marketing scholars. The user generated content on social media about brands and how stakeholders engage with them provides a data source that can sometimes be better than-, sometimes easier to obtain than-, and sometimes merely different to, the standard sources of data and research methods that managers have used, and academics exploited, in the past. Armed with powerful software to process this data, practitioners and scholars can shed new light on how stakeholders engage with brands.

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